

DEVELOPING ADAPTABLE AND EFFECTIVE LEADERS: A PRACTICAL APPROACH IN THE ERA OF UNCERTAINTY

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore how adaptive leadership can be implemented in practice, based on practitioners' viewpoints in particular organizational contexts across various industries and areas of activity. A qualitative research methodology was used, centred on in-depth interviews with representative leaders from different professional areas. The purpose of the empirical approach is to identify the relevance and efficiency of adaptation in the exercise of leadership, as well as to analyse how the traits of an adaptable leader are recognized, valued and put into practice in real work environments. The findings support the practical application of the analysed concepts and highlight the multiple benefits that adaptive leadership brings in increasing performance, team cohesion and organizational resilience. In addition, the study provides arguments for the idea of professional mobility: leaders who develop these capabilities can make easier transitions to other areas of activity, including emerging or less popular industries with high development potential. This identification of the intersection points between the characteristics of effective, authentic and adaptable leaders will be followed and highlighted, as a prerequisite for outlining common traits that can define the basis of a relevant and applicable leadership model.

Keywords: Adaptive leadership, Leadership competencies, Leadership, Decision-making.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a concept that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution that encompassed the so-called "teamwork" as its main pillar (Song, 2025). The idea

of leadership development should be rethought as an investment in the organization's infrastructure, not as an occasional expense for training. It must be included within the organizational architecture, integrated into the day-to-day work and evaluated in terms of the organization's ability to adapt, rather than by ticking off individual competencies (Khan, 2026). The manner in which this concept will be operationalized will continue to change over the coming years, broadening its scope. However, we can identify a "red line" that imbues a person's leadership capacity. We want to identify the main assets, the key competencies, fundamental to the leadership position and whether they are found in several fields of activity.

In this regard, 12 business leaders were interviewed to identify how key skills are found in their activity. The results contribute to shaping a modern leader profile, applicable in a current professional context of the era in which adaptability is a fundamental competence. This analysis allows a clearer understanding of the essential traits that define a leader beyond the specifics of the industry or occupational role. At the same time, the intersection points between the characteristics of effective, authentic and adaptable leaders were tracked and highlighted, in order to outline common traits that can be the basis of a relevant and applicable leadership model.

Beyond the theoretical substantiation of the need for adaptability in leadership, the paper aims to investigate the applicability of this concept in concrete organizational contexts, belonging to various fields of activity. In this regard, a qualitative research methodology was used, centred on in-depth interviews with representative leaders from distinct professional areas. The purpose of this empirical approach is to identify, from the practitioners' perspective, the relevance and efficiency of adaptability in the exercise of leadership, as well as to analyse the way in which the traits of an adaptable leader are recognized, valued and put into practice in real work environments. The conclusions support the practical applicability of the analysed concepts and highlight the multiple benefits that adaptive leadership brings in increasing performance, team cohesion and organizational resilience.

2. MANAGING AS THE FOUNDATION OF LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

The ability to manage is the first of the fundamental characteristics of an authentic leader (Fayol, 1949). His ability to manage the entire set of resources entrusted to him together with the task of using them in order to obtain results, represents a great responsibility. It is no coincidence that we start with this characteristic of the leader, since with many of the other capacities, the results are more or less subjective, while management often involves numbers, diagrams, tables and other results that place you as a leader in a favourable or unfavourable position. An authentic leader is aware of the impact of administration and the system of administration that he operates on the performance of the organization. He knows that the

administrative organization must be thought of in terms such as: maximizing profit, streamlining the process, product quality.

Another important aspect of management, confirming the qualification to be at the base of capacities, is generated by the interconnections with the other capacities exposed in the following sections of the paper. An authentic leader cannot manage if he is not able to make decisions based on his own systems of interpretation of situations and results. And finally, but not unimportant, to manage for multiple purposes, but not to distort the vision of the organization.

A first thing that a leader has to manage refers to his own strengths and weaknesses, which he must first know. This vision is consistent with the one supported by Maxwell (2022), in whose view, for the operationalization of effective leadership, self-knowledge is an indispensable condition. Leaders who are aware of their own attitudes, behaviours and reactions and who persist in self-knowledge, are those who, faced with different situations encountered in the organizational context, are much more prepared to lead others.

One of the most important dimensions of effective leadership resides in the ability to manage resources, whether tangible or intangible. A leader is not only a visionary voice or a role model, but also a strategic steward of all the elements necessary to achieve organizational objectives. In other words, leadership does not work in a vacuum: it operates in relation to resources, which it must identify, mobilize, prioritize and protect. The leader's competence is therefore directly tested by the coherent management of these resources, and his performance is reflected not only in his vision or motivation, but also in the way he allocates, capitalizes on and integrates these resources into the daily activity of the organization. Yukl (2008) believes that an effective leader is one who, above all, coordinates his available resources to achieve sustainable results aligned with the organization's long-term strategy.

3. COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

An important aspect in the art of communication is the leader's sense of creating the optimal context and situation for communication, as Abric (2002) calls and defines it: "the most favourable situation for the expression of the other is therefore the situation in which he does not feel judged, analysed or interpreted, nor guided by advice, nor manipulated or harassed by questions. It is a situation through which he simply feels listened to". This quality is a defining one for facilitating communication, since it would be useless to use the best communication strategies, especially in the studied context between the leader and the team, if there is a lack of the context conducive to the response, acceptance of any opinion and dialogue, in a general sense.

In a leadership context, informational communication is indispensable, as it ensures a clear understanding of objectives, procedures and performance indicators. This quality of the leader to communicate informatively not only requires accuracy regarding the message, but also attention to the way it is delivered: qualitative, in the right tone, comprehensive and at the level of understanding of the receiver. Also, adaptable leaders understand that such communication is the key to reducing ambiguity and operational errors. At the same time, they are aware of the current situation regarding the large amount of information. The study conducted by Klein et al. (2023) demonstrates, after questioning almost 1000 employees, that 38% of them claim that they receive an "excessive" volume of communications from their organization. Thus, the leader's ability to filter, prioritize and synthesize information becomes one of major importance.

Informative communication is not devoid of emotional impact. The way of formulation, the tone, the method, the place and the situation can influence the team's perception of the leader and even the manner in which the entire entity is organized as a whole. Thus, informative communication, although apparently technical, represents an important part of the characteristics of authentic and, at the same time, adaptable leaders. Feedback communication is one of the most sensitive, but essential forms of interaction within organizations. It has the role of correcting behaviours, encouraging performance, strengthening professional relationships and, last but not least, supporting the professional and personal development of team members. Unlike informative communication, which is centred on the strict transmission of information, feedback involves an evaluative intervention, involves a judgment, a decision and a positive or negative positioning on the action or attitude of the receiver. In the field of leadership, this type of communication plays an important role in maintaining and increasing the team's performance and in motivating it, both collectively and individually. Unlike other forms of communication, it involves a delicate balance between objectivity and interpersonal sensitivity, between exigency and support. The role of the modern leader is not only to point out what is not working but, more than that, to create a framework and a task evaluation system in which people can understand, accept and act for improvement.

According to Rusu (2007), depending on the impact they generate, conflicts can be classified into positive and negative ones, thereby helping to understand an essential distinction for leaders who seek to harness the constructive potential of organizational tensions, to foresee the type of conflict and its repercussions, and thus they can prepare their strategy and position towards the conflict. In an ever-changing professional environment – where organizational demands and a diversity of values, perspectives and approaches are inevitable –, the ability to redirect the overall context of the conflict toward constructive goals becomes essential. In this sense, he acts as a conscious mediator, preventing the escalation of destructive conflicts and stimulating active involvement in identifying common solutions.

Servant leadership has been recognized as particularly important for the performance and success of organizations; consequently, increased attention is given to developing and maintaining leaders' positive attitudes and behaviours towards their subordinates (Hassan et al., 2025). Servant leaders are perceived as effective because they do not ignore conflicts but approach them in a solution-oriented way, promoting open dialogue, empathy, and reconciliation. Through this approach, conflicts become opportunities for learning and development, not sources of permanent tension (Xiu et al., 2024). Moreover, Jonker and Dube (2025) advance the idea that the servant leader guides his employees in an ever-changing context, encouraging and developing reflection processes. This will support a positive climate, meant to boost team performance.

The adaptable leader is one who can assume conflicts as opportunities, not failures. He does not seek superficial harmony, but encourages the expression of differences in a controlled and respectful framework. In doing so, positive conflict becomes a catalyst for progress, clarifying roles, improving processes and strengthening team cohesion. This type of leader not only intervenes in resolving conflicts, but anticipates them and creates contexts in which unexpressed tensions can be discussed and managed constructively.

4. DECISION-MAKING AND DELEGATION

Duke (2023) symbolizes the decision-making process as being similar to the structure of a tree. The trunk is the moment of decision and the ramifications represent the multitude of possible solutions. The thickness of certain branches represents the capacity to support several small branches that have, in turn, their own branches. The metaphor used symbolically suggests the human system of thought when faced with every important decision. The decision-making process is at the heart of the activity of any authentic leader. In an organizational context, each decision reflects not only the leader's analytical skills, but also the values, strategic vision and ability to adapt to the complexity of the external and internal environment. Whether it is daily, operational decisions, or strategic choices that shape the long-term direction of the organization, the decision-making act is inseparable from the reality of management. Thus, understanding the typologies of decisions and the factors that influence this process is essential for an effective and responsible approach to contemporary leadership.

By clearly differentiating between programmed and unprogrammed decisions, a realistic picture of the daily and strategic challenges that leaders face is outlined (Prodan, 2007). In a dynamic organizational world, where routine coexists with uncertainty, the ability to recognize the nature of a situation and apply the right decision becomes an essential navigation tool. Leaders who understand this typology not only

optimize their time and resources when facing recurring problems, but also become more adaptable when unexpected shifts arise, meeting uncertainty with confidence.

In organizational decision-making, leaders are often faced with the choice between making individual decisions or involving the team in decision-making (Istudor, 2013). This choice influences not only the effectiveness of the decision, but team's level of engagement and cohesion. Based on the principles of adaptive leadership, the ability to alternate between individual and collective decisions, depending on the situation, is essential. An effective leader recognizes when it is necessary to make a quick decision and when it is beneficial to involve the team to achieve the best results. Adaptive leadership describes the ways people and organizations recognize and respond to complex problems that go beyond purely technical solutions, requiring shared learning and shifts in behaviour (Rahman et al., 2026). Furthermore, a systematic investigation of the social dimensions is necessary, including the impact of adaptive leadership on job satisfaction and employee well-being, as well as the individual characteristics, skills, and leadership styles that contribute to the manifestation of effective adaptive leadership (Sott & Bender, 2025).

A leader who promotes a contemporary and flexible vision and embraces empowerment recognizes that he must consider the practical framework proposed by Tracy (2024), which outlines a set of key conditions for effective and meaningful empowerment in today's organizational environment. In its essential form, empowerment begins with the careful choice of the person to whom a particular task is entrusted. The adaptive leader does not empower randomly, but identifies the compatibility between the demands of the task and the employee's competencies, which ensures an answer to the question: "How does he empower a leader?".

In Maxwell's (2012) view, empowerment is no longer a time management tool, but an act of cultivating the potential of those around them. People feel that they are validated, that they are given real responsibility and, implicitly, that they are part of the process of common growth. One of the most obvious benefits of empowerment lies in the development of employees' skills. When team members are invested with real responsibilities, they have the opportunity to practice and expand their skills in a practical context. Each delegated task becomes an opportunity for learning and improvement.

5. METHODS

The study was based on two recurring but essential questions: "Is it enough for the leader to be the person with the greatest technical capacity in the respective field?" and "Are other capabilities of the leader more important? If so, then wouldn't those competencies be useful to him in any team and in any field?". The answers were neither short nor easy, but their search led to a complex, realistic and, above all, relevant overview for the world in which we live and work. Thus, the need for leaders to build their position on

competencies outside the technical spectrum was highlighted, skills that allow them the adaptability to lead and have a positive influence on the teams they lead, even in different fields of activity.

To determine the degree to which the core competencies of adaptive leadership are found in professional practice, a qualitative study was carried out, based on in-depth interviews. The information collected comes from direct discussions with leaders from profit-oriented organizations in Romania, selected to cover a variety of fields such as IT, services, finance, retail and manufacturing. Moreover, each interviewed leader coordinates teams that comprise between 10 to 60 people.

A total of 12 individual interviews were conducted, with an average duration of 60 minutes each. The technique used was that of the semi-structured interview, thus allowing a certain flexibility. Each interview began with an introduction during which the respondents were informed about the purpose of the research, how the data will be used, as well as the confidential nature of the answers provided, in accordance with the ethical norms of qualitative research.

In the course of the discussions, the focus was on exploring the personal experiences of the leaders relative to the analysed aspects. The questions integrated in the interview guide were not rigidly imposed, but were adapted throughout each conversation to allow authentic and spontaneous answers that were as relevant as possible for the professional context of each participant. Although there was a list of predetermined topics, the aim was to identify similarities or differences depending on the field of activity. In order to maintain the accuracy of the information, all interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and subsequently transcribed in full and selected according to the relevance of the answer and personal experience for each topic. Concerning the transcription stage, the names of companies, colleagues or other details that appeared in the interviewees' speech and that could have led to the direct identification of them or other persons were removed.

6. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The answers provided at the beginning of the interviews outline a general framework of the participants' professional path and provide the necessary context to understand their leadership experience. Most of the respondents brought into discussion the fact that they have gone through significant changes of field or professional adaptations at some point, an aspect that was useful for the research per se. Also, their level of experience differs depending on the responsibility they had regarding the number of subordinate people, as well as the time period during which they worked in that position.

6.1 Adaptability

The obtained answers reveal that adaptability is one of the basic traits that leaders feel they must constantly develop. The rapid changes in the professional environment, the diversity of teams and the specific context of each field force those in management positions to adjust their behaviour and work style. A common aspect refers to the relationship with people. The participants emphasize that adapting to different generations, to varying levels of experience or to personal states is a real but inevitable challenge.

[...] I adapted the most to the part with the people because they were very different in age, in generations. This was the biggest challenge; to adapt to the generations. (Alexandra, Team Leader)

The above-mentioned statement suggests the difficulty, but also the need for continuous adjustment to intergenerational realities, which requires increased flexibility in team management. Adaptability is not only perceived as a skill, but as an essential component of performance in leadership roles. For other interviewees, adaptability is a process of personal development. They point out aspects such as active listening, managing emotions and changing communication style – essential elements that they have learned or perfected over time.

I try not to get angry so quickly, to be calmer. And I also listen a lot to the opinion of my interlocutor, the opinion of the person in front of me. (Petru, Company Administrator)

[...] I have changed the way I approach people, the way I approach situations according to the workload, according to the personal state of the person. (Adriana, Process Expert)

[...] something that I've honed over the years. There were a few principles I had – I think I had them before I got this job – but once I had the job, I refined them and managed to file them away into certain well-documented, well-organized little drawers, and I developed some principles for the smooth functioning of the environment I work in. (Emanuel, Team Leader)

In today's leadership, technical knowledge is no longer enough. Effective leadership requires human skills, vision, the ability to communicate objectives and support autonomous teams. The interviewees' responses highlight this change in perspective. One of the respondents clearly states that the technical aspects are secondary to the human dimension of leadership.

In second place is technical knowledge, so to speak, or professional knowledge. In the first place is our development as a person and what vision we have, how we approach situations. So, from my point of view, character and personality are priorities in this field of leadership. (Petru, Company Administrator)

In the same vein, the next leader that was interviewed proposes a managerial vision oriented towards strategic delegation to other specialists to manage the technical details.

[...] very often, I maybe don't have enough technical expertise or maybe I haven't done that practical thing from a technical point of view, I just know exactly what that process to follow looks like. And my

goal is to make sure that I have people prepared to do this in a team, specialists who are very, very carefully selected and who know how to address that technical problem. (Emanuel, Team Leader)

Relative to a particular example, even in the accounting field, where a high technical rigor is anticipated, we have received a response that contrasts with traditional expectations.

[...] in order to be able to coordinate an accounting department, you need more than accounting and this ability to, how to say, lead, coordinate, manage situations and interpersonal conflicts [...] (Raisa, Chartered Accountant)

Only one interviewee approached a different opinion on the subject of technical capability:

No, I'm never going to get the technical out of this, but it's also good for people to understand the objectives. (Răzvan, General Manager)

6.2 Managing

In most of the responses, effective management was perceived as the leader's ability to achieve the maximum possible based on the resources being managed. The first responses refer to the human resource and the efficient management of tasks:

To delegate the team's tasks. Everyone needs to know very precisely, or exactly, what they have to do. To make sure that they don't have too much or too little activity and, at the same time, at the end of the year, to have an efficient financial balance sheet. (Petru, Company Administrator)

[...] I think that, in order to administer very effectively, you must first know the maximum possible of what you are administering. (Emanuel, Team Leader)

On another level, for two of the interviewed leaders, team autonomy and internal leadership development represent administrative success.

That's the greatest quality of a leader – to make the other become autonomous. If people depend on you, then you're not a leader. You're just a boss. (Răzvan, General Manager)

From my point of view, effective management comes down to the ability to develop other leaders – somewhat as an entrepreneur, if we take it as an example –, [namely] the capacity or skill to develop intrapreneurs in key roles, areas or departments within the company [...] (Gabriel, Entrepreneur)

When asked which resource is the most difficult to be managed, the interviewed leaders identified two major directions, namely human resource management and time management. The provided answers show that, although other resources also involve a certain degree of complexity, the human resource is the most sensitive.

From my point of view, none of them is that complicated, but maybe it's a little harder to get to human resources now. (Petru, Company Administrator)

Definitely the human resource. Because people, each of them, have their problems, they have their troubles, they have their better, less good days. (Albert, Company Administrator)

One of the respondents clearly points to time as the most pressing resource:

[...] at the moment, time; there is a lot of work and little time. (Alexandra, Team Leader)

The classic model proposed by Fayol (1949) regarding the main activities of management – planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling – is recognized by most of the interviewed leaders as being present in their day-to-day work, regardless of the field of activity. However, those in the corporate sphere were able to identify each component with slightly greater precision and accuracy.

At the beginning of each quarter we have a schedule that shows the events that are impactful. Then, in the coordination part, we have all kinds of notifications that we have to send to our colleagues. And, if something happens, we have a few people that we designate, who could help us. And, related to control, we are there all the time, on support. (Alexandra, Team leader)

[...] planning, then we take the information internally, we think about it, then we implement it, we coordinate it and then, of course, it must be controlled. A procedure that is not controlled will not last and it is a procedure that will not exist after a few days. So always, you always have to have a control system. (Emanuel, Team Leader)

The following remark was unexpected, as it refers to the observation of an imbalance identified in his own experience, materialized by an exaggeration of control that transfers too much pressure to the team.

[...] there are still some who do well both the first and second stages [...], but they exaggerate with control. It's not that much healthy control. (Valentin, Branch Manager)

6.3 Communicating

A leader does not only pay attention to the communication of information, but is aware of the need to create and maintain an environment in which people feel listened to, understood and involved. Most of the leaders pointed out the need for people to be listened to and their willingness to do so.

I try to set aside some time for private or one-on-one discussions [...] and listen to them quite a bit. (Petru, Company Administrator)

Before I blame [...] I listened to him, why did you do that? [...] and later, in this situation, how could you proceed in the future? (Alexandra, Team Leader)

As part of developing communication-friendly environment, the idea of fostering a sense of belonging to the organization's mission and vision was introduced.

[...] the person to understand the importance he has at the team level and somehow to arouse his inner motivation to get involved and "pull" in the same direction [...]. (Gabriel, Entrepreneur)

First, I need to help people feel important and give them confidence; I need to show them that their opinions are important [...] (Cristian, Project Manager)

In today's modern organizations, the volume of information is often overwhelming. The leaders who were interviewed were well aware of these issues and noted that they are involved in two defining ways. On the one hand, they take on the role of information filters for their team and, on the other hand, they create information classification systems.

I pass the information to the team only when it is absolutely relevant. I mean, there is a lot of small information that I don't pass on to the team [...]. I mean, I'm quite selective, I would say, with the information I pass on to the team. The information I pass on means that it's really important and vital. (Emanuel, Team Leader)

There's one thing that we use, like this high importance/ low importance/ urgent, and we classify information according to things like this. Another categorization is need to do/ need to know/ good to know, and we put them that way, and people have the freedom to enter the communications that seem important to them. (Adriana, Process Expert)

The leader's capacity for evaluation was confirmed by all the leaders interviewed and, according to them, it represents one of the key functions of leadership:

[...] We had a saying: "Man, we can measure this thing". If we can measure it, then we can do it. If we can't measure it, then we have nothing to achieve. (Valentin, Branch Manager)

In the past, there was periodic evaluation, there were even tests, they participated in courses [...]. It was a form through which we evaluated from 1 to 5. (Raisa, Chartered Accountant)

[...] we like, first of all, to delegate a responsibility to him, not an actual task. [...] When, for example, that person does the job for which we pay him, he/ she is in the standard. (Albert, Company Administrator)

It is often the task of the leader to establish units of measurement relevant to the work of each team member for an objective evaluation.

We have some metrics to track – volumes. And the biggest emphasis is on volume. We have several metrics, around 10-15 indicators that we have to track. But, in general, it's volume and quality. These are quantified. (Alexandra, Team Leader)

We have some performance indicators for each position. (Răzvan, General Manager)

6.4 Managing conflict

Conflict, although unwanted, is an inevitable reality of teamwork, and the leader's ability to identify the source and differentiate the type of conflict is the dominant part of resolving it. Leaders' responses bring up

conflicts that arise from dissatisfaction with pay equity or benefits, as well as rules imposed by management or different temperaments of team members.

Usually, conflict arises from someone who feels wronged. [...] Moreover, this part of extending contracts also on the salary or KPIs part. (Alexandra, Team Leader)

The sources of conflict are on the management side of the way we work [...], decisions that come "from above" without a possibility of being changed and that create frustration. (Adriana, Process Expert)

[...] people's personality. Some are more vocal and are more dynamic, others are more passive and are quieter. And then, when people who have realistic or unrealistic expectations about those around them or about their colleagues have certain points that they consider normal and consider that everyone should relate there, they start to be vocal and that generates conflicts. (Cristian, Project Manager)

The way a leader responds to tensions within the team reflects their positioning and their ability to maintain functional professional relationships. On this topic, most respondents said they feel represented by a style of accommodating and collaboration. However, two of the leaders also mentioned avoidance as a strategy used in certain situations – responses that were felt to carry a note of vulnerability and sincerity.

I always try to accommodate the conflict and bring back good communication, team collaboration. (Petru, Company Administrator)

Not avoiding and not forcing at all. (Emanuel, Team Leader)

Some of those with a different answer from the majority said:

I think the avoidance. (Albert, Company Administrator)

Although I've used avoidance many times, I've realized that it's not exactly the most appropriate and healthy. Accommodating and collaboration – these two seem to me to be the most effective. (Cristian, Project Manager)

The leaders' responses converge on the same conclusion: the intensity of conflicts decreases when the leader makes himself accessible to the team.

The fact that you know what it's like to be in the position of those people or subordinates, that helps a lot. See what I'm going through every day, because you've been there too [...]. (Alexandra, Team Leader)

Indeed, I also notice when I have time to talk even with unqualified people or, no matter which one in the team, it seems that certain conflicts or situations are resolved much faster [...]. (Petru, Company Administrator)

If he is a leader who coordinates all the activity, it is really important that he knows the problem from the grassroots [...]. It is very important to be among people, that is, the position of leader does not position you at the top of the pyramid. (Gabriel, Entrepreneur)

6.5 Decision-making

The ability to make decisions is, according to the leaders interviewed, an essential condition for a team's effective functioning and for clarity of direction within the organization. Many of them refer to the career path as the sum of the decisions they have made and understand the importance and major responsibility that comes with this privilege of leadership. At the same time, leaders in the corporate sphere recognize that their decision-making space is limited.

It's vital that the leader can make decisions. Because if there's no one making the decisions, it's chaos. So, decisions in the leadership position are vital. (Adriana, Process Expert)

Every time I want to make a decision, it must first be approved by the person at the top of the pyramid. (Alexandra, Team Leader)

Life experience is a concrete confirmation of the theory:

[...] I got where I am, thanks to the decisions I made. And I say that I am satisfied with the level I am at now. (Raisa, Chartered Accountant)

From my point of view, it is very important to make certain decisions, to assume them, to move forward with them until we consider that they are okay [...]. Throughout my life, it seems to me that they have given me a lot of confidence in myself, this assumption and decision-making, and we give ourselves greater courage in the future to make even more and bigger decisions. (Petru, Company Administrator)

Beyond the necessary skills and experience involved in the decision-making process, the leaders interviewed were also asked to share the support tools they use to make optimal decisions. The answers differ from one leader to another in the sense that some approach introspection and reflection on a personal level, and others opt for rational, intuitive or technological methods. The obvious conclusion is that none of them disregarded the need for decision-making tools.

[...] I realized that sometimes it is very, very difficult for me to make decisions. [...] decisions, in fact, are the basis of any success, from my point of view. (Albert, Company Administrator)

I anticipate the results that will come from the decisions I make. And here I have to somehow follow a puzzle, to follow exactly what will be the next pieces that I will place after my decisions and through that to anticipate how the image will look. (Cristian, Project Manager)

As a proof that good decisions are not a matter of chance, the interviewees were asked about the balance between intuition and concrete data. The answers highlighted a general inclination towards rational pragmatism, with small variations. Most participants emphasized the importance of objective data.

70% I believe that concrete data. Maybe even more, it depends on the situation. (Raisa, Chartered Accountant)

Concrete data prevails in making a decision. I also guide myself by intuition, but it's a percentage of maybe less than 20%. (Petru, Company Administrator)

We also find answers that tend toward the intuitive side, noting that, at times, leaders lack the presence of clear figures, or decisions require expertise grounded in each leader's own experience and values.

50-50 for me, depending on the type of decision. (Valentin, Branch Manager)

There are certain decisions that I make with emotional priority, there are others that I make with rational priority. As a rule, I go to the area of identifying clear arguments, concrete values, but I believe that finding balance doesn't come with a guaranteed recipe for success. (Gabriel, Entrepreneur)

6.6 Empowering

Empowering was perceived by the interviewed leaders as a fundamental leader competence, most of them bringing up the topic before getting to it per se, which proves both the importance of empowering and the interconnectedness of competencies between them. The confirmation of the practice of empowerment can be found in the responses of all the interviewed leaders.

I practice empowerment at a capacity of 101%, so to speak. I practiced it a lot, often, with several people in the team. [...] If the people on my team do 90%, 96% of what I would do, I'm very satisfied. (Emanuel, Team Leader)

I have noticed, lately, that this is essential and very important and I try to empower as much as possible and leave the responsibility and authority to the empowered person. (Petru, Company Administrator)

Quite often, I would say. I try to share from my tasks or from the things that are assigned to me. Not only to give them to them, but to give them freedom and transparency, to see things. (Adriana, Process Expert)

The criteria that the interviewed leaders use in choosing the empowered person brought answers in which terminological similarities can be found, but presented in different order. For most of them, trust, mentioned in one form or another, was one of the criteria mentioned, but for some of them trust was the first criterion considered to choose the right person for the task.

Once I have to know the person quite well, then I have to find that he/ she is a sincere, honest person, with the desire to do and to learn and to be well informed. (Petru, Company Administrator)

Their capacity and experience. What relationship do I have with that person in the sense that, if they do something stupid, they trust to tell me? Let them come and tell me so that I can smooth out the repercussions that may arise later [...]. (Alexandra, Team Leader)

Like any other subject, empowerment also has its followers and opponents. Asked how they evaluate the practice of empowerment, whether it is effective in terms of time or, on the contrary, generates more problems for them, the common perception of the leaders was that empowerment makes their work easier.

[The leader who does not empower] is a weak leader. That is, he is a leader who has not communicated the need and expectation well. (Emanuel, Team Leader)

Although most of the participants affirm a pro-delegation position without any reason for restraint, we also find in the formulated answers an open recognition of the difficulties encountered, emphasizing the process of transition from effort to efficiency.

Initially, it creates problems for me, but then it's easier. Initially, I have to spend more time solving the things I gave by empowerment, until people learn the standard. (Adriana, Process Expert)

This is a reality that I'm sure many entrepreneurs face. And then we have to get used to the idea from the beginning and the fact that, no matter how much we tried to empower, we will definitely have to give a part of our company and organization to that person. (Albert, Company Administrator)

Despite the fact that some leaders were sceptical about the subject of adaptability from one field to another, the answers were unanimous in relation to the presumption that, if they started working in a new field tomorrow, they would become people with a leadership position again? This coherence was also reinforced by leaders who had already experienced the transition between several different areas in which they came to hold a position of authority.

Considering that I had two experiences like that, yes. Because my main drive is in absolutely everything I do and if I started in a new environment, no one is irreplaceable, but I want to make myself the hardest to replace. (Alexandra, Team Leader)

I am convinced that in a short period of time I would become a person who assumes a certain responsibility there. (Petru, Company Administrator)

Yes, I've thought about this a lot of times and I don't say it as arrogant or I don't say it thinking I'm very good. But I see in my mind certain skills or certain aptitudes. And I look around and I see that there are few people who take on the responsibility of leadership, of giving direction, of being very clear in communication, of communicating expectations, of communicating these principles that I talked about. (Emanuel, Team Leader)

Anything other than accounting? I don't know. Not on sales, I've never liked selling [...]. If I understood the field well and had, how to say, a preparation beforehand, I think I would. (Raisa, Chartered Accountant)

Yes, because I understood one thing: that a business will never go bankrupt with too much money. The man who manages to bring money into the business is one of the most, if not the most valuable. (Albert, Company Administrator)

7. CONCLUSIONS

The applicability of the study is extensive and deeply relevant in the current era, marked by uncertainty, accelerated pace of change and the increasingly acute need for adaptable and authentic leaders. Beyond the theoretical and analytical dimension, the paper aims to provide a practical tool, whose conclusions can be strategically directed in two essential directions: to individual leaders and to the organizations that train or hire them.

First of all, the study addresses organizational leaders, providing them with a basis for reflection on their own activity as well as a certain guidance for personal development. According to the results of the research, the five leadership competencies, namely effective administration, strategic communication, conflict management, decision-making, and empowerment, prove to be fundamental for adaptable and effective leadership. Thus, leaders are encouraged to assume a continuous learning process and even be motivated to proactively invest in strengthening these skills. In addition, the study provides arguments for the idea of professional mobility: leaders who develop these capabilities can make easier transitions to other areas of activity, including emerging or less popular industries with high development potential.

Secondly, the paper is directly addressed to organizations, which are invited to rethink their strategies for recruiting, selecting and training managerial staff. One of the clear conclusions of the study is that a valuable leader is not defined exclusively by his technical skills, but by a set of fundamental skills that support and encourage the performance of teams. From this perspective, organizations can gain a consistent competitive advantage if they choose to invest in people who demonstrate these key competencies or in their continuous development. This approach not only optimizes managerial efficiency, but also opens access to a more diversified human resource, including potential leaders from other fields, who have the necessary skills to lead, even if they do not have direct technical experience in that sector.

The qualitative research integrated into the structure of the study proves the beneficial potential of identifying the intersection points between different organizations. Between leaders of different teams, from different fields of activity. It can be considered that, by increasing the number of interviewees, therefore

also by proportionally increasing the number of fields in which they operate, more similarities, competencies and potential sources of learning can be identified for modern leaders and organizations.

The future research directions could be directed towards studying the operationalization of the five fundamental leadership competencies within organizations other than profit-oriented such as non-profit or public ones. These types of leaders work in environments where the motivations are not exclusively economic, but rather values, beliefs, social missions, and collective needs. That is why it is important to investigate whether and how the five competencies are found in their leadership styles, if they are valued by the communities they represent and how they manifest themselves concretely in their daily work.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work the authors used ChatGPT-4.5 (OpenAI) – R.-D. T. and Writefull (Digital Science) – A.-A. Ș. in order to translate transcripts, improve sentence structure, and enhance the clarity of the written text. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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