

Business Educators' Critical Reflection on Leadership

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Abstract: It is axiomatic: Leadership is pivotal for positive organisational results. Pervasive literature can guide, yet many organisations suffer unsatisfactory results. It is a question of the gap between intent and execution. Mountains of leadership literature obfuscate versus clarify. This distortion demands scrutiny. Our research question is: "What is leadership?" Our research methodology was reflection (Dewey and others), attempting clarification to improve understanding and guide successful action. Our findings demonstrate that literature inconsistently defines leadership which impacts understanding and practice. Leadership is often studied from the perspective of either (a) the *person*, specifically their competence, i.e., knowledge, skills, attitude, experience, and behaviour about (i) themselves, (ii) cultivating positive relationships with others, (iii) nurturing effective teams, and (iv) business/technical/job-related content, or (b) *function*, i.e., attaining organisational results by goal achievement through coordination of organisation-wide activities supported by the free-willed cooperation of all organisational members, or (c) *social influence*, that is leadership behaviour impacting the functioning of the organisation. Research primarily examines leadership as social influence. These three perspectives are seldom integratively studied, suggesting mutually exclusive domains. However, person, function, and social influence are interconnected. Our findings imply leadership as an interplay between the person, the collective, and contextual conditions impacting organisational results. Therefore, studying leadership from the combined perspectives of person, function, and social influence is more useful. Doing so provides a holistic understanding that ensures attaining positive organisational results. The value of the study includes that reflection, an underused research method examining leadership, can limit proliferation of superfluous literature that often produces confusion. Both academics and practitioners can question their thinking, assumptions, and actions to guide better actions and to approach better results. We recommend further study to hone reflective practice and learning.

Keywords: Leadership; Business Results; Strategy Execution Failure; Leadership Competence, Functions, Behaviour; Critical Reflection

1. Introduction

Axiomatic: *Leadership* is pivotal for positive *organisational/business results*. Business results refer to realising the intent to *create and deliver value* – economic, functional, psychological, or a combination – for all stakeholders (Busulwa et al, 2021; Nienaber and McNeill, 2023). Business results are expressed in terms of goals and aim at the long-term thriving of the business and its members (March and Simon, 1958; Hogan et al, 2021). Leadership attains business results through adept strategy execution. Strategy is executed by suitably competent employees performing their daily duties in a *coordinated system of cooperation* that aligns key actions and strategic intent through the mechanism *structural dimensions of organisation for executing strategy* (Nienaber and McNeill, 2023). Coordination and cooperation are central to *competitive advantage* (Nienaber and McNeill, 2023; Thompson et al, 2022). Competitive advantage means a business creates and delivers (offers) value better or differentially than its rivals and it is contingent on the specific market served, customer-sought-value, and access to requisite value-creating resources. Thus, competitive advantage facilitates strategy execution and ensures positive business results (Thompson et al, 2022).

Copious extant literature can guide; however, many businesses continue to suffer unsatisfactory results (Deng et al, 2023; Gentry et al, 2021; Kaiser and Hogan, 2010). CEO and top management team turnover is a consequence of delivering, or expecting to deliver, unsatisfactory business results (Blumenfeld, 2024; Gentry et al, 2021; Jenter and Kanaan, 2015). CEO departures reached a record high in the 4th quarter of 2023 (Blumenfeld, 2024), often indicating a failure to attain positive business results. Unsatisfactory business results are a question of the gap between intent and execution. This gap arises from either incompetence or malfeasance (Gentry et al, 2021; Hogan et al, 2021; Jenter and Kanaan, 2015). Incompetence includes the mismatch between CEO ability to lead the business or failure to anticipate and adapt to changing environmental conditions (Hogan et al, 2021; Jenter and Kanaan, 2015).

A well-meaning deluge of leadership literature is not helpful in supporting leadership to return positive business results. On one hand, literature explodes with nanoscopic additions to address purported morality issues (Deng et al, 2023). On the other hand, many leadership assessment tools are not helpful in supporting them in attaining positive business results. Some of these tools measure approval and not results. Others measure behaviour or

actions and do not account for integrity issues (Collins, Algaze and Posner, 2023; Kaiser and Hogan, 2010; Kaiser, Hogan and Craig, 2008). These leadership literature shortcomings are aberrant and deviant because integrity is integral to business literature while business results can be objectively measured (CIPD, 2016; Nienaber and McNeill, 2022).

Uninhibited leadership literature often obfuscates versus elucidates. Perplexion demands scrutiny. Our research question is: “What is leadership?” Our focus is on business, specifically from a general management perspective, because leadership is accountable for business results (Jarzabkowski, Seidl and Balogun, 2022; Thompson et al, 2022). The significance of our study derives from a concern that inept leadership menaces the long-term thriving of the business and its members, particularly the mental health of members, which is the contemporary health crisis (Gallup, 2024; Hogan et al, 2021). We studied the research question by *reflection* (Cunliffe, 2016; Dewey in Sage, 2014; Roberts, 2008) and addressed next. The paper closes with conclusions, contributions, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

2. Reflection

Reflection has many different meanings depending on the source consulted. We see reflection as the process of questioning and critically thinking about cognition and sentiments in terms of (a) who we are, our behaviours or actions, interactions with people with diverse capacities, needs, aspirations, and thus diverse realities, decisions, attitudes, beliefs, values, (b) our assumptions underpinning business policies, practices, structures, (c) the impact that these (a and b) have or may have, whether intended or unintended, and (d) the consequent development of new insights or conclusions which shape different thinking, action, interactions, etc. to improve future outcome effectiveness (Cunliffe, 2016; Greenberger, 2020; Mortari, 2015; Roberts, 2008; Sage, 2014).

This description of reflection is compatible with the views of scholars such as Dewey (1910, 1933), Gibbs (1984), Kolb (1984), Mezirow (1998), and Schön (1983) (Sage, 2014). Reflection is associated with learning as, too, is leadership itself (Cunliffe, 2016; Kjellström, Stålné and Törnblom, 2020; Roberts, 2008; Sage, 2014). In Dewey’s view, thinking and learning happens in perplexing, doubtful, uncertain, or problematic situations that require solutions (Mortari, 2015). Hence, reflection integrates theory and practice, especially by learning from experience, that cultivates ongoing competency mastery (Cunliffe, 2016; Greenberger, 2020; Roberts, 2008). Consequently, reflection is a suitable method of studying leadership, which is an ongoing learning process, to improve leadership effectiveness, i.e., attaining positive business results (Cunliffe, 2016; Kjellström, Stålné and Törnblom, 2020; Roberts, 2008).

There are many ways to practice reflection, yet it is infrequently undertaken owing to a lack of skill. One way to operationalise reflection is by applying a framework consisting of three basic questions, namely:

- Observation: Identify and describe an experience – i.e., what happened or what struck me, what was my role, what emotions surrounded the situation?
- Analysis and synthesis: Making sense and reinterpret the observation from different perspectives – i.e., what were the setting/context and primary elements observed? What is the relevance of prior learning in terms of theory and/or experience to paint the ‘bigger picture’ to understand or question one’s assumptions – i.e., what does this mean or why do I think this happened? How does this relate to theory? Are all elements accounted for? How does this connect to my understanding of this issue?
- Evaluation and application: New learning and understanding resulting in different actions related to personal and/or professional lives - i.e., in what areas did I make progress in terms of what I have learned from this experience and what will I do differently in future? What are the weak points that I need to explore further? (Cunliffe, 2016; Greenberger, 2020; Mortari, 2015; Roberts, 2008; Sage, 2014).

We use the above reflection framework to organise our study.

2.1 Reflective Observation: Identify and Describe an Experience

Leadership, as concept, has been around for centuries. However, it is still defined in numerous, and sometimes conflicting, ways (Collins, Algaze and Posner, 2023; Deng et al, 2023; Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Kjellström, Stålné and Törnblom, 2020). Leadership is often conceptualised as (a) a position requiring a formal role/function accountable for business results, (b) the person occupying the formal role and specifically the competence required to be effective in the role, or (c) social influence exhibited in their style and behaviour that impact the functioning of the business (Collins, Algaze and Posner, 2023; Deng et al, 2023; Hogan et al, 2021; Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Northouse, 2021). Research primarily examines leadership as social influence (Collins, Algaze

and Posner, 2023; Deng et al, 2023; Hogan and Sherman, 2020). These three perspectives are seldom studied integratively, thus erroneously suggesting mutually exclusive domains. This is odd, as the perspectives person, function, and social influence in some combination, are central in leadership definitions proposed by influential leadership scholars (Collins, Algaze and Posner, 2023; Deng et al, 2023; Hogan et al, 2021; Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Northouse, 2021).

As business educators, we find the observation that the three leadership perspectives are seldom integratively studied perplexing. People and actions are interconnected – the corporeal person filling a position, discharging a positional function, and exerting social influence while doing the job are interwoven. This statement is echoed in the general management definition of leadership adopted in this study, namely: “Leadership is the employees’ perception of the capacity of their hierarchical superiors (which stems from the superiors’ behaviour) to direct their subordinates’ activities and behaviours to pursue a desired outcome (like a business goal); and the outcome is pursued in an (intended) coordinated system of cooperation in conjunction with other resources, all of which are interlinked” (Morkel, Nienaber and McNeill, 2021:26). Consequently, this perplexing observation requires renewed scrutiny.

2.2 Reflective Analysis and Synthesis: Reinterpreting the Observation From Different Perspectives

Here we address our setting and the literature we use to inform our understanding, as encapsulated in our definition of leadership.

2.2.1 Our Setting/Context

We are business educators teaching leadership to prepare future leaders to effectively discharge their accountability, i.e., attain positive business results. Leadership, from the perspective of general management, is an applied science. Thus, leaders must integrate (multi-disciplinary) theory and practice to be effective. Given the complexity of the business environment, it is impossible to conceive of and predict every possible future situation that leaders may encounter. However, to ensure effective responses, including responses to unpredictable and unknown situations, one continuously learns from experience (actual or perceived) that can probabilistically improve intended outcomes. Reflection is a method educators can use to improve their professional practice as well as prepare their students to be effective leaders (Cunliffe, 2016; Roberts, 2008).

2.2.2 The Literature

We focus our reflection on relevant and recent literature, citing seminal authors, as used in our teaching. In this way, we ensure that we do not omit important sources (Goldman, 2023). Our sources include general management, finance, organisational behaviour, operations management, psychology, and human resources. Thus, we cover a range of perspectives on leadership to provide a holistic account that includes most, if not all, relevant elements affecting business results. This holistic account provides a more complete understanding of leadership, enabling a sound theoretical explanation and allowing the skilful application of theory (Jaccard and Jacoby, 2020).

To restate our leadership definition: “Leadership is the employees’ perception of the capacity of their hierarchical superiors (which stems from the superiors’ behaviour) to direct their subordinates’ activities and behaviours to pursue a desired outcome (like a business goal); and the outcome is pursued in an (intended) coordinated system of cooperation in conjunction with other resources, all of which are interlinked” (Morkel, Nienaber and McNeill, 2021:26). This definition is consistent with management and other scholars. This definition synthesises and encapsulates leadership as (a) corporeal person, (b) function, and (c) social influence, impacted by personality, reputation, and competence, to attain business results by executing strategy through the structural dimensions of organisation.

The following elaborates on the three key elements of our definition of leadership. First, we discuss characteristics of each definitional element from a singular perspective. Second, while not denigrating the importance of each element’s characteristics, we question each element’s strengths – as viewed in singularity - to adequately understand the complexity of leadership.

2.2.2.1 Leadership as Corporeal Person

Leadership is naturally linked to a *corporeal* person – that is, a whole, physiological, and bodily person (cf. Hogan and Kaiser, 2004). *Person* refers to the individuality occupying the *formal* leadership position, performing that

function, and impacted by his/her *personality* which is idiosyncratic to the person (Hogan et al, 2021; Hogan and Sherman, 2020). Personality is generally classified according to the taxonomy of the Five-Factor Model of Personality (and consistent with the Hogan Personality Inventory measuring personality) viz. (a) agreeableness (interpersonal sensitivity) – trusting, accommodating, caring; (b) extraversion (ambition and sociability) – sociable, assertive, active; (c) conscientiousness (prudence) – reliable, dependable, hardworking; (d) emotional stability (adjustment) – adjusted, composed, resilient; and (e) openness to experience (inquisitiveness) – educated, imaginative, unconventional (Kaiser and J. Hogan, 2011).

Personality comprises *identity* and *reputation* (Hogan and Kaiser, 2004; Hogan and Sherman, 2020). Identity refers to how a person views him-/herself and is reflected in consistent inclinations to think, feel, and behave, catalysed by the person's inherent traits and in responding to the environment (Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Kaiser and J. Hogan, 2011). Reputation refers to the consensus of others' (dis)approval of leadership's behaviour, i.e., how others, such as subordinates, view leadership success based on leadership competence (Hogan, 2015; Hogan and Kaiser, 2004; Hogan and Sherman, 2020). Reputation (others' view) is deemed more important than identity (self-view) in achieving business results, as the degree of member cooperation is influenced by reputation (Hogan and Sherman, 2020).

Competence, sometimes called competency, is variously defined (George, 2021). The consensus explanation of competence is that it comprises knowledge, skills, experience, and behaviour essential to perform a job productively (Nienaber and McNeill, 2023). Hogan and Warrenfeltz's (2003) competence taxonomy covers all competency frameworks and models. It comprises four domains, viz., (a) intra-personal competence (self-awareness) corresponding to the personality factors emotional stability and conscientiousness, (b) interpersonal competence (cultivating positive relationships with others) corresponding to the personality factors extraversion and agreeableness, (c) leadership competence (nurturing effective teams), corresponding to the personality factor openness, and (d) technical competence (business/technical/job-related content), corresponding to all personality factors. These competence domains are intertwined (Nienaber and McNeill, 2023). However, mastery of intra-personal competence is essential to master all other competence domains and is also the most challenging to master (Hogan and Kaiser, 2004; Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003).

Competence is one of the inborn motivational levers of all humans (Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Nienaber and McNeill, 2023). Competent leadership ensures that every business member (a) understands his/her role and purpose in attaining business results, (b) is allowed to apply their competence autonomously (willingly and fully) in performing their role and purpose, (c) thrives by continuously improve their performance through enhancing their competence, and through (a) to (c) nurtures sound interpersonal relationships (Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Nienaber and McNeill, 2023). Consequently, every business member can perform at their best, i.e., they are engaged and thus experience high levels of well-being and contribute optimally to the business' competitive success (CIPD, 2022; Hogan and Kaiser, 2004; Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Nienaber and McNeill, 2023).

In essence, competent leadership has integrity and is, therefore, *trustworthy* – they do not abuse their position – they earn their members' respect and autonomous cooperation because they are sensitive to the needs and rights of others, including their subordinates, and thus enhance people's well-being (Hogan and Kaiser, 2004; Kaiser and J. Hogan, 2011; Kouzes and Posner, 2021; Northouse, 2021; Padilla, Hogan and Kaiser, 2007). Integrity is reflected in the personality factors conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability (Kaiser and Hogan, 2010). Trustworthy leadership complies with "The theory of moral sentiments" (Smith, 2010[1759]) and is consistent with Barnard's (1948) notion of morality (Nienaber, 2019).

Leadership, as corporeal person, has its challenges when studied from a singular perspective. Leadership departures (turnover) based on poor performance and malfeasance support the observation of Hogan (2015) that people assigned to formal leadership positions are not necessarily effective as they do not achieve positive business results (Blumenfeld, 2024; Gentry et al, 2021; Jenter and Kanaan, 2015). Therefore, leadership competence (inherent in the corporeal person) should be matched to the business function.

2.2.2.2 Leadership as Function

Leadership, as *corporeal person*, should be 'up to the task,' i.e., attain positive business results through collectively outperforming the competition (Hogan and Kaiser, 2004; Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Thompson et al, 2022). Leadership, as *function*, means being effective in attaining business results through goal achievement by *coordination* of business-wide activities and supported by the autonomous *cooperation* of all business members. Both of these accomplishments align key organisational actions with strategic intent (Morkel, Nienaber and McNeill, 2021; Nienaber and McNeill, 2023; Thompson et al, 2022).

Coordination, according to Kaiser and J. Hogan (2011), relates to task-oriented behaviour (e.g., roles, responsibilities, and factors facilitating production). They add that the personality factors conscientiousness (prudence) and emotional stability (adjustment) are central to task-oriented behaviours. Coordination is critical to effective leadership (Hogan and Kaiser, 2004). Cooperation is associated with (a) interpersonal behaviour, both forceful and enabling (e.g., concern for the welfare of subordinates, soliciting subordinates' input, and maintaining relationships with the group) as well as (b) transactional leadership, while the personality factors extraversion (ambition and sociability) and agreeableness (interpersonal sensitivity) are central to interpersonal behaviour (Kaiser and J. Hogan, 2011). Coordination and cooperation are the crux of leadership (Goldman, 2023). This description of leadership as function denotes attaining *competitive advantage* over rivals.

Competitive advantage means that the business delivers customer-value better (lower cost) or differently (differentiation) than the competition, which arises from the execution of value-creating activities (Nienaber and McNeill, 2023; Thompson et al, 2022). Competitive advantage consists of three interrelated dimensions viz. (a) the market where the business chooses to compete, (b) customer value, whether economic, functional, psychological, or a combination, and (c) access to resources particularly people, and pertinently their competence, to transform resources along with other inputs into customer-valued offerings (Morkel, Nienaber and McNeill, 2021; Nienaber and McNeill, 2023). As such, competitive advantage facilitates strategy execution and produces financial returns greater than average industry profits (Thompson et al, 2022). Competitive advantage is the particularity of a sound strategy. Hence, it is reasonable that competitive advantage is contingent on the direction of the business, viz., the purpose, vision, mission, goals, and values (Nienaber and McNeill, 2023; Thompson et al, 2022). Direction setting is associated with change in behaviour and the personality factor openness (inquisitiveness) is central. Openness also fosters innovation, that is, initiating and adapting to change to ensure the long-term survival and thriving of the business and its members (Kaiser and J. Hogan, 2011).

The mechanism to attain competitive advantage is *structural dimensions of organisation for executing strategy* that govern value-creating activities and form the basis of the business' operational plan (Collier and Evans, 2020; Kaiser, Hogan and Craig, 2008; Nienaber and McNeill, 2023). Structural dimensions of organisation for executing strategy consist of 'framework' and 'processes.' The framework dimension of organisation is fairly stable and arranges coordination. Coordination harmonises all organisational activities to produce efficient functioning (Kaiser and J. Hogan, 2011; Nienaber and McNeill, 2023). 'Framework' comprises 'structure' and 'systems' (Morkel, Nienaber and McNeill, 2021). Structure encompasses (a) the formal organisation of roles and responsibilities reflected in job design, subsuming authority accompanying the job, (b) policies and procedures that support effective job performance, (c) leadership, explicitly creating an environment conducive to activating thriving employees, and (d) culture, expressly permitting appropriate risk-taking that delivers innovation which in turn fosters thriving employees and businesses (Bosley, 2023; Hogan and Kaiser, 2004; Parker and Knight, 2023). Systems allocate resources to execute tasks productively through their constituting parts, i.e., (a) budgets, (b) management information, (c) training (learning and development), and (d) operational controls in striving to realise planned performance (Collier and Evans, 2020). To be effective, the constituting parts of the framework structural dimension of organisation for executing strategy should be congruent. Moreover, the framework and processes dimensions of organisation for executing strategy should also be congruent, as interplay exists between these dimensions.

The processes dimension of organisation for executing strategy governs cooperation. Cooperation involves individual behaviours and reflects the relationships between business members (Kaiser and J. Hogan, 2011; Nienaber and McNeill, 2023). Cooperation impacts business members' thriving to the degree that they are permitted to apply their competence autonomously (willingly and fully) in pursuit of business results through strategy execution, i.e., they are engaged and not alienated (Cunliffe, 2016; Hogan et al, 2021; Kahn, 1990; Kaiser and J. Hogan, 2011). Cooperation consists of interaction and sanctions, which are ephemeral. Interaction involves communication, and sanctions involve rewards and punishments. Communication includes consultation with relevant stakeholders (Jarzabkowski, Seidl and Balogun, 2022), particularly business members, about the strategic (a) content, (b) process, and (c) outcome. Strategic content involves *what* of strategy, e.g., growth, maintenance, divesting, focus, low cost, differentiation (Thompson et al, 2022). Strategic process involves the *who* (internal and external stakeholders), *how* (sophistication, formality, deliberate/emergent/combination), *where* (context, e.g., stable/volatile, national, regional, global, variables from the economic, technological, social, legal environments impacting strategy), and *when* (frequency) of strategy formulation, execution, and control. Strategic outcome refers to whether and degree to which planned goals were realised (Thompson et al, 2022). Sanctions involve power and rewards or punishments that rely on and simultaneously impact competence,

autonomy, and relatedness, the motivational levers of human behaviour, allowing or obstructing people to execute strategy (Hogan, 2015; Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Jarzabkowski, Seidl and Balogun, 2022; Nienaber and McNeill, 2023). To be effective, the constituting parts of the processes dimension of organisation for executing strategy should be congruent.

Leadership, as function, has its challenges when studied from a singular perspective. Research suggests that leadership, as *function*, fails given the persistent strategy execution failure (Tawse and Tabesh, 2021). Many reasons are offered for this failure with the (a) strategy formulation-execution divide, (b) absence of suitably competent people to execute strategy, and (c) indifference to customer-sought-value at the top of the list (Nienaber and McNeill, 2023; O'Boyle, 2023; Tawse and Tabesh, 2021). These reasons are central to the business's direction and are accomplished through coordination and cooperation. Consequently, the strategy execution failure can be summarised as leadership failing to attain a competitive advantage vis-à-vis rivals (Morkel, Nienaber and McNeill, 2021).

The observation (leadership as function fails) supports Hogan (2015) and Kaiser, Hogan, and Craig (2008) that there is a difference between successful leaders – persons assigned to leadership positions based on their approval – and effective leaders – persons who attain business results. Approval is subjective, while effectiveness can be objectively measured in terms of business results (outcomes) attained, such as profit, customer satisfaction, productivity, innovation, and employee satisfaction to mention a few (CIPD, 2016; Kaiser, Hogan and Craig, 2008, Nienaber and McNeill, 2022). These outcome measures reflect value delivery and how well the planned performance was realised. However, these outcome measures are often overlooked (CIPD, 2016; Nienaber and McNeill, 2022). As set out here, leadership, as function, relies on task-behaviour, interpersonal-behaviour, and change behaviours which are commensurate with strategic, operational, and interpersonal behaviour styles and contingent on all four competence domains (Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003; Kaiser and J. Hogan, 2011). Leadership style is intrinsically conjoined with social influence, addressed next.

2.2.2.3 Leadership as Social Influence

Leadership, as *social influence*, is the dimension most often studied (Deng et al, 2023). Social influence is defined differently. For example, 'process of influence' (Northouse, 2021), 'leadership style' (Morkel, Nienaber and McNeill, 2021), and 'behavioural style' (Yukl, 2006 in Kaiser and J. Hogan, 2011). These different definitions share a commonality, namely that social influence flows from a leader's behaviour (or actions) that spawns a consequent reputation and corresponding follower inducements to cooperate (or resist) toward a common goal (Collins, Algaze and Posner, 2023; Kouzes and Posner, 2021). As discussed earlier, cooperation is accomplished through the processes structural dimension of organisation for executing strategy.

Further, influence valence is not adequately defined. The literature seemingly suggests that influence is predominantly positive. It often ignores or diminishes the fact that influence can be alienating - especially in cases of leadership incompetence or malfeasance (Hogan et al, 2021; Hogan and Kaiser, 2004; Jenter and Kanaan, 2025; Padilla, Hogan and Kaiser, 2010). Nevertheless, influence refers to *how* leadership leads accompanied by consequent effects on business performance (Hogan and Kaiser, 2004; Kaiser and J. Hogan, 2011).

How leadership leads depends on a leader's personality and competence, which receives little attention in leadership literature. As mentioned, personality is generally classified according to the Five-Factor Model (corresponding to the Hogan Personality Inventory), namely, agreeableness (interpersonal sensitivity), extraversion (ambition and sociability), conscientiousness (prudence), emotional stability (adjustment), and openness to experience (inquisitiveness). As pointed out, the personality factors correspond to the competence domains, and as follows (i) intra-personal competence (self-awareness) corresponds to the personality factors emotional stability and conscientiousness, (ii) interpersonal competence (cultivating positive relationships with others) corresponds to the personality factors extraversion and agreeableness, (iii) leadership competence (nurturing effective teams), corresponds to the personality factor openness and (iv) technical competence (business/technical/job-related content), corresponds to all personality factors. In addition, intrapersonal competence is associated with a *forceful behavioural style*, interpersonal competence is associated with an *enabling behavioural style*, and technical/business competence is associated with *strategic and operational behavioural styles*. Forceful and enabling behavioural styles are linked to *how* leaders lead, while strategic and operational behavioural styles are linked to *what* leaders lead (Kaiser and J. Hogan, 2011).

In sum, personality, i.e., who we are, foretells how we lead (leadership style), whereas leadership style influences employee attitude and degree of cooperation and reflected in the level of employee engagement that drives business performance (Gallup, 2024; Hogan and Kaiser, 2004). Further, effective leadership creates an

environment conducive to advancing employee competence by encouraging appropriate risk-taking behaviours that spur innovation, that mobilizes employee engagement (Kaiser, Hogan and Craig, 2008; Nienaber, 2022). Employee engagement means people are available – physically, cognitively, and emotionally - to use their competence autonomously in performing value creation activities, that is, doing their daily jobs, which constitutes strategy execution, which is aimed at attaining business results (Hogan, 2015; Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Jarzabkowski, Seidl and Balogun, 2022; Kahn, 1990; Nienaber, 2022).

Leadership, as social influence, has its challenges when studied from a singular perspective. It needs to be pointed out that most studies on leadership as social influence do not specify the context in which the business operates (Collins, Algaze and Posner, 2023; Deng et al, 2023), suggesting that leadership happens in a vacuum. The reality is that businesses operate in an environment (macro, market, and micro) with variables impacting business results (Thompson et al, 2022). Notable variables impacting business results include the economic conditions (boom or bust), technology (AI), customers, specifically what they value, and the competition. Leadership should account for these variables, and particularly the changes brought about by these variables, in striving to attain positive business results (Jenter and Kanaan, 2015; Thompson et al, 2022). Thus, *what* (operational domains) leaders lead should simultaneously be considered with *how* to lead (Hogan et al, 2021; Jenter and Kanaan, 2015; Kaiser and J. Hogan, 2011). As stressed, *what* one leads is integral to leadership as function and discussed in the previous section.

Leadership as social influence is an ignominious failure considering the global low levels of employee engagement. According to the latest Gallup Report (2024) only 23% of the global workforce was engaged. By implication 77% of the global workforce was not engaged or even alienated. Hence, we assert, that leadership as social influence – at least in 2024 - was ineffective in attaining positive business results.

2.3 Reflective Evaluation and Application: Our Learning

Our discussion demonstrates the interdependency of leadership as synthesised corporeal person, function, and social influence, thus, enabling an integrated study of leadership. Research results show that leadership is failing to attain positive business results. This indicates that the practice of studying leadership solely from a singular perspective – only as person, function, or social influence – represents mutually exclusive domains, which is an incomplete and unproductive pursuit.

Studying leadership from the combined perspectives of corporeal person, function, and social influence is more useful. Doing so provides a holistic understanding that ensures attaining positive business results. To succeed in studying leadership holistically means examining literature from all disciplinary domains informing leadership. These include general management, organisational behaviour, operations management, finance, human resource management, psychology, and industrial and organisational psychology.

However, we acknowledge that the different disciplines focus on different epistemologies. Ontology (reality studied) overlaps, but epistemology (knowledge) is distinct. Thus, integration of sorts is necessary to advance effective leadership with a commensurate positive impact on businesses and societies. Our study, an extension of the work of R. Hogan and colleagues, provides the groundwork to do so.

2.3.1 What Will we do Differently

In future, we will expand on and integrate leadership and the theory of moral sentiments, addressing integrity, which is critical for effective leadership. In addition, we will explore business results measurement about business results attained, to provide clearer linkages.

3. Conclusions, Contribution, Limitations, and Recommendations for Future Research

Leadership as corporeal person, function, and social influence are syncretistic. Further, as portrayed in the literature, the different leadership conceptualisations - person, function, and social influence - have more commonalities than differences than is generally expected. The different leadership conceptualisations can be seamlessly integrated and holistically studied to improve leadership effectiveness. Our study's contribution includes using reflection as an alternative and underutilised research methodology reveals new insights to leadership. These insights improve our understanding of leadership that can benefit academics and practitioners, and potentially support long-term positive business results. The study's main limitation is the time-consuming nature of the reflection methodology, thus restricting nanoscopic attention to the quotidian leadership conceptualisations. We recommend further research guided by the adage "Excellence is difficult to achieve."

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