

A Thematic Analysis of Leadership Effectiveness in the Development Sector

Ankita Rath^{1*}, Jyotiranjana Gochhayat², Rudrashree Ramayan Sasmal³

¹ School of Rural Management, KIIT Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, India.

² School of Rural Management, KIIT Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, India.

³ School of Economics and Commerce, KIIT Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, India.

Abstract:

Leadership effectiveness research remains disproportionately anchored in corporate, market disciplined settings, leaving open how effectiveness is understood in mission driven organisations that answer to donors, governments, and beneficiaries simultaneously rather than to a single market signal. This study examines how senior development sector professionals construct and describe leadership effectiveness in their own terms. Twenty semi structured interviews were conducted with professionals holding a minimum of eight years' leadership experience across international and national non governmental organisations (NGOs), government development programmes, corporate social responsibility (CSR) foundations, disaster and emergency response agencies, and independent policy advisory roles, recruited through purposive, maximum variation sampling supplemented by snowball referral. Data were organised using Framework Analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994; Gale et al., 2013) and coded through Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) six phase reflexive thematic analysis, combining sensitising codes with inductive theme development. Eight themes emerged: the redefinition of success around mission fidelity rather than output metrics; a distinctive multi principal, no market signal accountability structure; leadership style as situationally and ethically constructed rather than innate; a composite of strategic patience, moral courage, and relational intelligence; a field-headquarters divide experienced as structural strain; followership organised around presence, congruence, and advocacy; a persistent decoupling of perceived competence from actual opportunity for women; and anticipated futures centred on digitisation, distributed leadership, and staff wellbeing. The findings extend corporate derived leadership theory by identifying a beneficiary facing referee of effectiveness that has no analogue in market based accounts, and by documenting mechanisms of gendered opportunity restriction specific to this sector. The study is limited by its reliance on retrospective self report and by the absence of beneficiary or junior staff perspectives, which the paper's implications and future research agenda directly address.

Keywords: leadership effectiveness; development sector; NGO leadership; women in leadership; thematic analysis; framework analysis; qualitative research

1. Introduction

Development sector organisations NGOs, public agencies, and community based bodies operate in settings where leadership failure is not merely an efficiency loss but a human cost. Yet the academic literature on leadership effectiveness remains largely anchored in corporate, profit driven hierarchies, and the frameworks it has produced travel awkwardly into mission driven, resource scarce, and culturally diverse contexts. The mismatch has practical consequences: leadership in this sector involves navigating donor dependency, political fragility, community accountability, and chronic workforce burnout in combinations that corporate leadership theory rarely has occasion to model together.

Existing leadership constructs each capture part of the picture. Transformational leadership is a robust predictor of follower attitudes and performance (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Judge & Piccolo, 2004), and has been shown to outperform transactional leadership specifically within non profit organisations in terms of affective commitment and organisational citizenship behaviour (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2020), including in a non governmental setting in India (Shiva & Suar, 2012). Servant leadership predicts follower wellbeing and has been the subject of sustained

theoretical consolidation (Eva et al., 2019). Ethical leadership predicts follower trust and acceptance (Brown & Treviño, 2006), and authentic leadership has been validated as a distinct, measurable construct with incremental predictive value beyond both (Walumbwa et al., 2008). A parallel trait and behaviour tradition has sought to integrate these strands empirically (DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011), while practice based models emphasise exemplary leadership behaviours as learnable rather than dispositional (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Yet no framework integrates these outcomes into a single account that is native to the development sector's own accountability structure one in which, as recent scholarship on NGO governance documents, leaders answer upward to donors, downward to beneficiaries, and horizontally to peer organisations at once, with no market mechanism disciplining the arrangement (Tran, 2020; AbouAssi & Trent, 2016; Schnable, Appe, & Buyannemekh, 2025; Noble et al., 2025).

This structural distinctiveness is compounded by two further conditions rarely modelled together in mainstream leadership research. First, the sector carries a demonstrable wellbeing cost: humanitarian and aid workers show elevated rates of burnout, anxiety, and psychological distress relative to comparable occupational groups (Cardozo et al., 2012; Ager et al., 2012; Foo, Tay, Yang, & Verdelli, 2023), which places staff wellbeing and psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999) in direct tension with the sector's chronic resource scarcity. Second, gender operates in the sector in a specific and only partially theorised way: a substantial body of humanitarian leadership scholarship documents that women remain under represented in senior and operational command roles despite broad recognition of their competence (Patel et al., 2020; Lafrenière, Sweetman, & Thylin, 2019; Meagher et al., 2023), a pattern consistent with role congruity theory's account of the gap between perceived competence and perceived fit for leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002), and with evidence that informal networks rather than formal policy are frequently the mechanism that reproduces this gap across organisational contexts (Horak & Suseno, 2022).

This paper reports a thematic analysis of leadership effectiveness in the development sector, built from twenty semi structured interviews with senior professionals each with at least eight years leading teams, programmes, or policy work across international and national NGOs, government schemes, CSR foundations, multilateral advisory roles, and emergency response. Its aim is to build an independently, inductively derived account of what leadership effectiveness looks like from the perspective of the people who practise it, and to test that account against the leadership constructs summarised above. Accordingly, the study addresses one central research question: *how do senior development sector leaders themselves construct and describe leadership effectiveness, and in what ways does that construction extend or depart from leadership theory developed principally in corporate settings?*

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 situates the study within four bodies of theory general leadership effectiveness constructs, the structural distinctiveness of NGO and development sector accountability, sector specific wellbeing and psychological safety research, and gender in humanitarian and development leadership and states the resulting gap. Section 3 sets out the analytical approach: a hybrid of Framework Analysis and Braun and Clarke's six phase reflexive thematic analysis, how the twelve interview questions were coded, and the study's approach to trustworthiness and research ethics. Section 4 presents the resulting framework matrix. Section 5 reports the eight themes built from that matrix, argued through respondents' own language. Section 6 discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the findings. Section 7 states the study's methodological limitations, and Section 8 concludes.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Background

2.1 Leadership effectiveness constructs and their limits

Four value based leadership constructs dominate the contemporary literature. Transformational leadership articulated through idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration shows the strongest and most consistent meta analytic validity of any leadership style studied to date (Judge & Piccolo, 2004), including specifically within non profit and NGO settings, where it outperforms transactional leadership on affective commitment and organisational citizenship behaviour (Aboramadan &

Kundi, 2020; Shiva & Suar, 2012). Servant leadership, reviewed comprehensively by Eva et al. (2019) across two decades of research, foregrounds follower growth and wellbeing over leader self interest. Ethical leadership (Brown & Treviño, 2006) foregrounds the leader as both a “moral person” and a “moral manager,” while authentic leadership (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008) foregrounds self awareness, relational transparency, and an internalised moral perspective, with the latter shown to add predictive value beyond both ethical and transformational leadership. DeRue et al. (2011) subsequently integrated the older trait tradition with these behavioural constructs, showing that leader traits and behaviours jointly explain a meaningful share of variance in leadership effectiveness criteria, while relationship based accounts such as leader–member exchange (LMX) theory (Graen & Uhl Bien, 1995) shift the unit of analysis from the leader’s traits to the quality of the individual dyadic relationship between a leader and each follower a shift of direct relevance to a sector in which, as the findings below show, the relationship between field staff and headquarters is itself a site of contested leadership quality. Situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969) remains widely taught as a practitioner heuristic, and behavioural, practice based models such as Kouzes and Posner’s (2012) five exemplary practices continue to inform leadership development curricula, even where their empirical grounding is thinner than that of the constructs above.

What unites this literature is an implicit assumption that a leader answers principally upward to a board, a shareholder body, or a single hierarchical superior with a market or electoral mechanism ultimately disciplining leadership quality. That assumption does not travel cleanly into the development sector.

2.2 The structural distinctiveness of development sector and NGO leadership

Empirical leadership research conducted directly within development and health system organisations reinforces the case that the sector needs its own leadership account rather than an imported one. Qualitative studies of leadership under sustained resource scarcity for example, at the operational level of a health system in a protracted crisis context in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Bigirinama et al., 2023) and among healthcare managers navigating vision setting and followership in Addis Ababa (Teame, Debie, & Tullu, 2022) consistently find that leaders describe their effectiveness in relational and mission linked terms similar to those reported in Section 5 below, rather than in the output metric terms more common in corporate leadership research. NGO governance scholarship has, independently, increasingly formalised the intuition that development organisations answer to structurally distinct and only partially aligned stakeholders. Ejaz, Shaikh, and Rizvi (2011), studying NGO government partnerships in Pakistan, documented how health systems NGOs must simultaneously satisfy government counterparts, donor conditions, and community expectations that do not always align. More recent accountability scholarship distinguishes explicitly between “upward” accountability to donors and “downward” accountability to beneficiaries, and finds that resource and reporting pressures systematically favour the former even where organisations profess commitment to the latter (AbouAssi & Trent, 2016; Noble et al., 2025). Even NGOs structurally well positioned for strong downward accountability small, relationship based, transnational organisations struggle to operationalise it in practice (Schnable et al., 2025). At the level of organisational design, Tran (2020) shows that centralisation trades off internally perceived effectiveness against externally perceived effectiveness among international NGOs, a tension that maps closely onto the “multiple, non aligned principals” structure reported by respondents in this study. Distributed and shared leadership models (Bolden, 2011) offer one theoretical resource for organisations seeking to distribute this accountability burden across a team rather than concentrate it in a single leader, a possibility that recurs in this paper’s findings on anticipated sectoral futures.

2.3 Wellbeing, psychological safety, and crisis leadership in the sector

A substantial body of occupational health research documents that humanitarian and aid workers experience burnout, anxiety, and psychological distress at rates that reflect the chronic, cumulative stress of the work itself rather than isolated critical incidents (Cardozo et al., 2012; Ager, Pasha, Yu, Duke, Eriksson, & Lopes Cardozo, 2012; Foo et al., 2023). Team psychological safety the shared belief that a team is safe for interpersonal risk taking is strongly associated with learning behaviour and, by extension, with an organisation’s capacity to acknowledge and correct failing programmes rather than conceal them (Edmondson, 1999), a dynamic directly relevant to the “intellectual honesty” respondents in this study associate with effective leadership. Crisis

leadership research further shows that leader behaviour during acute emergencies is qualitatively distinct from leadership under stable conditions, typically demanding rapid, centralised decision making that only later gives way to more participatory modes (Bavik, Shao, Newman, & Schwarz, 2021) a pattern this paper's respondents in emergency response roles describe with striking precision.

2.4 Gender, informal networks, and opportunity in development sector leadership

Role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) proposes that prejudice against women in leadership arises not from a belief that women are less competent, but from a perceived incongruity between the communal qualities associated with the female gender role and the agentic qualities associated with leadership roles a distinction that anticipates the gap this paper's respondents draw between competence and opportunity. Humanitarian leadership scholarship substantiates this gap empirically: women remain under represented in senior humanitarian and conflict health leadership despite evidence that gender diverse leadership improves the inclusiveness of crisis response (Patel et al., 2020; Lafrenière et al., 2019), and qualitative work on women's leadership in health system strengthening documents the specific organisational and cultural barriers involved (Meagher et al., 2023). Two further mechanisms identified outside the development sector recur strongly in this paper's data: exclusion from informal professional networks, which channels sponsorship and visibility away from women regardless of formal policy (Horak & Suseno, 2022), and the structural "caregiving penalty" produced by time based, strain based, and behaviour based conflict between work and family roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), which interacts with the sector's expectation of geographic mobility in ways general work-family research does not fully anticipate. Mentoring research (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBois, 2008) further suggests that where women are excluded from the informal relationships through which mentoring and sponsorship typically form, they are structurally disadvantaged in career progression independent of any formal barrier.

2.5 Synthesis and gap

Taken together, this literature establishes four things reasonably well that leadership style and effectiveness constructs vary systematically by trait, behaviour, and relationship (Section 2.1); that NGO and development sector accountability is structurally multi principal in a way that has no clean market analogue (Section 2.2); that the sector carries a distinctive and severe wellbeing cost (Section 2.3); and that gendered opportunity restriction in the sector operates through identifiable mechanisms rather than through a simple competence gap (Section 2.4). What remains comparatively undertheorised is how senior practitioners *themselves*, across the sector's full range of sub sectors, integrate these four elements into a single, practice derived account of what effective leadership requires. This is the gap the present study addresses.

3. Methodological Approach

3.1 Research design and philosophical orientation

The study adopts an interpretivist, qualitative design on the premise that leadership effectiveness in this sector is best accessed through practitioners' own constructions of it rather than through a predefined, externally imposed instrument. A semi structured interview format was chosen to permit comparability across respondents on twelve core questions while allowing individual elaboration.

3.2 Design and sample

Twenty semi structured interviews were conducted with professionals holding a minimum of eight years' leadership experience in the development sector, recruited through purposive sampling supplemented by snowball referral. Purposive sampling was used deliberately to build a maximum variation sample (Patton, 2002). Rather than interviewing twenty people from similar organisations, the sample was constructed to span national and international NGOs, grassroots and community based institutions, government development programmes, corporate social responsibility (CSR) foundations, disaster and emergency response agencies, and independent policy advisory work.

Each interview followed a semi structured guide of twelve open ended questions covering definitions of leadership success, sector specific challenges, style, traits, organisational hierarchy, follower expectations, gender, and the

anticipated future of leadership in the sector. The sample size of twenty was set with reference to Guest, Bunce, and Johnson's (2006) empirical finding that thematic saturation in a reasonably homogeneous population is typically reached within twelve interviews, a range broadly consistent with subsequent systematic evidence that code saturation is commonly reached within nine to seventeen interviews (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). This study retained twenty interviews to provide a margin beyond that threshold and to account for the deliberately heterogeneous sample, which was expected to require more interviews to reach saturation given its spread across sub sectors. Consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2021) caution that "saturation" is better treated as a analytic judgement than a mechanically countable threshold, saturation is reported here as a rationale for the original sampling plan rather than as a claim independently verified through a formal stopping criterion procedure. Consistent with the anonymisation protocol agreed for this study, each respondent is identified only by a respondent code (R01 R20), and no demographic variable is used as an analytic category.

3.3 Analytic strategy

The twelve question, open ended structure of the interview schedule made Framework Analysis a natural fit for the data. Framework Analysis, originally developed by Ritchie and Spencer (1994) for applied policy research and subsequently formalised for multi disciplinary use by Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, and Redwood (2013), organises qualitative data into a matrix with one row per respondent and one column per question. This allows the analyst to read vertically, comparing how every respondent answered a single question, and horizontally, exploring how one respondent's answers hang together across the whole interview. A summary of that matrix is presented in Table 1.

Coding and theme development within the framework matrix followed the six phase thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), updated by their own subsequent clarification of the approach as reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This process began with familiarisation with the full dataset; generation of initial codes, worked question by question; a search for candidate themes across the matrix as a whole rather than within single questions; review of those candidate themes against the raw responses to confirm internal coherence and mutual distinctiveness; the definition and naming of a final set of themes; and write up with illustrative quotations. A small set of sensitising codes was used to seed the initial coding pass: funding uncertainty, participatory versus directive leadership style, the field versus headquarters divide, gender and structural barriers, staff wellbeing, and the evolving role of data and technology. This is a hybrid strategy rather than a purely inductive one, consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2006) own acknowledgement that a fully theory free inductive analysis is rarely achievable in practice, and it is treated here as a deliberate methodological choice rather than a departure to be minimised. A broadly comparable inductive, thematic approach to leadership effectiveness data has been used successfully in adjacent applied leadership research for instance in Chak and Carminati's (2022) qualitative study of effective project leadership in community academic health partnerships, which likewise built a process account of leadership from practitioners' own semi structured interview accounts rather than from a predefined instrument lending methodological precedent to the approach adopted here.

3.4 Trustworthiness and rigour

Trustworthiness was addressed across the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and operationalised for thematic analysis by Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017) and by Korstjens and Moser (2018). Credibility was supported through the hybrid sensitising code and inductive coding strategy described above, through the framework matrix's requirement that every theme be checked against all twenty respondents' answers to the relevant question(s) rather than against illustrative excerpts alone, and through sustained engagement with a purposefully heterogeneous sample. Transferability is supported by the deliberately maximum variation sample design (Patton, 2002) and by the detailed sub sector breakdown reported in Section 3.2, which allows readers to judge the applicability of the findings to their own context. Dependability and confirmability rest on the traceable, matrix based audit trail from raw response to code to theme summarised in Table 1 and Section 5. Respondent or "member" checking of the final themes (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016) was not conducted in this round of analysis; this is acknowledged explicitly as a limitation in Section 7 rather than presented as a completed step in the trustworthiness strategy.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Consistent with the anonymisation protocol already described, all respondents are identified only by code (R01 R20), and no demographic variable is reported or used as an analytic category, in order to protect respondents whose organisational roles could otherwise make them identifiable.

4. The Framework Matrix: An Overview of Response Patterns

Table 1 provides a condensed overview of the twelve question, twenty respondent matrix produced during coding: for each interview question, the dominant code or codes identified, and an indicative sense of how widely each was shared. The counts given are indicative rather than statistical, since several responses named traits or challenges spanning more than one code and are reported here under their primary code only.

Table 1. *Framework Matrix Summary Dominant Codes by Question (n = 20)*

Q.	Dominant pattern identified	Indicative distribution
Q1	Definition of success defined relationally and consequentially: mission fidelity, team trust, or a beneficiary/community outcome, rather than authority, output metrics, or career advancement	All 20 respondents, expressed in sector specific language
Q2	Sectoral distinctiveness multiple, often non aligned principals (government, community, beneficiary); mission timelines that outrun funding cycles	All 20 respondents named at least one of these structural features
Q3	Style formation style described as adaptively constructed: inherited from a mentor, shaped by sub sector tempo, or a deliberate value based choice, rather than as a fixed personal trait	All 20 respondents
Q4	Principal challenge no single dominant response; distributed across coordination failure, institutional discontinuity, sub sector specific legitimacy problems, and staff burnout	Funding/resource cycle $\approx$ 6 of 20; burnout named directly by 2; remainder ($\approx$ 12) spread across coordination, discontinuity, and legitimacy challenges
Q5	Key traits strategic patience; integrity and moral courage; relational/emotional intelligence; composure under acute pressure; diplomatic and systems skill	Patience $\approx$ 5; integrity/courage $\approx$ 5; relational intelligence $\approx$ 4; crisis composure = 2; categories overlap
Q6	Variation by level leadership demonstrably varies by organisational level: operational and relational at the field level, political and diplomatic at senior levels	All 20 respondents; 4 explicitly frame the resulting gap as organisational strain rather than a neutral division of labour
Q7	Follower expectations physical/relational presence; congruence between public statement and internal conduct; an advocacy or protective role toward followers and beneficiaries	All 20 respondents named at least one of these three expectations

Q.	Dominant pattern identified	Indicative distribution
Q8	Gender competence framed as not gender determined (14); observations consistent with that view but not stated as a general claim (3); a stronger lived experience/standpoint claim, concentrated in gender focused sub sectors (3)	14 / 3 / 3 of 20 see Section 5.7
Q9	Fairness of opportunity no respondent affirmed unqualified fairness; every response was qualified or negative, most consistently at senior, technical, and regional levels	20 of 20 responses
Q10	Barriers for women mobility/safety based exclusion; competence stereotyping and “soft skill” typecasting; family/caregiving penalty; informal network exclusion; community level bias	Mobility $\approx$ 6; stereotyping $\approx$ 7; caregiving $\approx$ 4; network exclusion $\approx$ 3; community bias = 3; categories overlap
Q11	Future evolution digitisation/data fluency; distributed or coalition based leadership; staff wellbeing and accountability as an explicit leadership priority; sub sector specific structural adaptation	Digitisation $\approx$ 6; distributed leadership $\approx$ 4; wellbeing/accountability $\approx$ 3; 5 respondents explicitly framed part of their answer as a hope rather than a prediction
Q12	Message to future leaders humility and proximity to the community served (7); decisiveness and courage under pressure (4); people first, wellbeing oriented culture (3); remainder distributed across individually framed counsel (6)	7 / 4 / 3 / 6 of 20

Note. Counts are analyst assigned primary codes drawn from a purposive, maximum variation sample of twenty respondents; they are reported to indicate the shape of the data, not as inferential statistics.

5. Thematic Findings

The analysis identified eight themes, each built from the framework matrix described above and argued through the respondents’ own words. The themes are presented in the order in which they were consolidated during analysis, which roughly follows the sequence of the interview schedule, though several themes draw on more than one question.

5.1 Theme One: Mission Fidelity over Metric Compliance

When the twenty respondents were asked, in their own words, what successful leadership looks like in the development sector, they described a set of relational and consequential tests: whether a team stayed together through funding shocks (R01), whether “the children in our programme actually learn better because of the decisions you make” (R03), whether a staff member “would follow you to a new 2202igitization if you moved” (R11), or whether “the most vulnerable child in our programme is safer today than a year ago” (R09).

A second, closely related theme concerned the importance of lasting impact beyond the individual leader. R07 gave the starkest version of this: for her, successful leadership “is building something that can survive without you. If the 2202igitization collapses the day you leave, you haven’t really led, you’ve just managed.” R12, reflecting on more than two decades in the sector, defined success as whether “the community trusts you enough

to tell you the truth, even when it's not what you want to hear" a definition that locates leadership success not in the leader's own judgement of their performance but in followers' willingness to be honest with them, a formulation that sits close to Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) account of trust as a function of a trustee's perceived ability, benevolence, and integrity.

Donnelly, Gibson, and Ivancevich's (1992) six parameters and DuBrin's (2008) four factors of effective leadership treat effectiveness as something assessed by superiors, peers, and followers within the 2203igitization. What these interviews add is a further referee that the corporate leadership literature has little occasion to theorise: the beneficiary or community member who is neither an employee nor a customer in any market sense, yet whose changed circumstances a child's literacy, a farmer's willingness to try a new technique, a survivor's sense of being fought for rather than merely represented is treated by these respondents as the ultimate test of whether their leadership has worked. This sits closer in spirit to the distinction Stutzman (2016) draws between career success and genuine leadership effectiveness than to a purely 2203igitization internal account. In disaster response, effectiveness narrows to a single, time restricted test: "can you make the correct call in the first six hours, when there's no time to consult anyone" (R08). In child protection, it is framed almost entirely around harm prevention (R09). In policy advisory work, it stretches across years or decades: "the patience to move policy incrementally, because there is rarely a single decisive moment like in business" (R17). These are not variations on a single theme so much as evidence that "leadership effectiveness" in this sector is not one construct but a family of related constructs long term impact on others' lives, trust in a leader, follower acceptance and conviction, and critical decision making ability under constraint.

5.2 Theme Two: The Structural Distinctiveness of Development Sector Leadership

Asked how the sector differs from others in leadership terms, respondents converged on a set of structural features that recur across CSR, government, INGO, and grassroots contexts alike, even though the respondents describing them have almost nothing else in common professionally.

The most prominent is a multiplicity of principals who do not always want the same thing. R02 put it plainly: "our 'customer' and our 'funder' are two completely different people with different priorities, and a good leader has to serve both honestly." R04, working across multiple country programmes, extended the point further: "you answer to governments, donors, civil society and beneficiaries simultaneously, often with competing interests." R17, from a policy advisory vantage point, went further still: "accountability is diffused across so many actors... that leadership here is really about influence, not command." This structural pattern is well documented in recent NGO governance research, which distinguishes upward accountability to donors from downward accountability to beneficiaries and finds that resource and reporting pressures systematically privilege the former even in organisations structurally well positioned to prioritise the latter (AbouAssi & Trent, 2016; Schnable et al., 2025; Noble et al., 2025), and which links this multi principal structure to trade offs between internally and externally perceived 2203igitization2203l effectiveness (Tran, 2020). It is a genuinely different accountability structure from the one assumed in most mainstream leadership theory, where a leader answers principally upward, to a board or shareholders, with the market disciplining the arrangement as a whole. Here there is no single upward line, and, as the second recurring feature makes clear, no market at all.

5.3 Theme Three: Leadership Style as Situational Construction

None of the twenty respondents described their leadership style as something they simply have. Instead, it was a style inherited from a mentor and then modified, a style forced into being by short staffing, or a style consciously carried over from an earlier career and then partly unlearned.

The most vivid account of forced formation comes from R03: "I didn't really 'decide' a style, it developed from necessity. When you have three staff covering fifteen villages, you learn to lead by doing, not by delegating." A comparable account of deliberate unlearning comes from R20, who described a shift "toward long term, systems based thinking rather than short project cycles, which took real unlearning from earlier in my career," and from R02, who came from a corporate background and has "consciously slow[ed] down and buil[t] in more consultation with field staff" than his original training would have produced. A second, analytically sharper pattern is the

hybrid, phase dependent style reported by respondents working in acute emergencies. R08 described switching completely between two styles within a single response cycle: “command and control during an emergency, then I switch to a much more collaborative style once the immediate crisis passes.” R16 reported an almost identical pattern with a specific boundary attached: his style has been “forged mostly during floods and cyclone responses, very directive in the first 72 hours, then I deliberately open up decision making after that.” This pairing of 2204igitizatio, directive decision making in the acute phase with a subsequent shift toward participation is consistent with crisis leadership research showing that effective leader behaviour under acute time pressure differs systematically from effective behaviour once a crisis 2204igitizati (Bavik et al., 2021). It is not that these leaders are directive or participative as a fixed style, but that they treat the two modes as sequential tools deployed on a fairly precise, self monitored clock a more disciplined and time bound version of Hersey and Blanchard’s (1969) situational leadership than the general theory itself specifies. This suggests that in high tempo, high stakes sub sectors, situational adaptation is closer to a trained reflex than a loose stylistic preference. A third pattern, distinct from both of the above, is style as a deliberate value commitment rather than a response to circumstance. R13 described her approach as “deliberately feminist: I build flat structures, share credit visibly, and push decision making down rather than holding it centrally” an orientation that closely tracks Spreitzer’s (1995) account of psychological empowerment as meaning, competence, self determination, and impact distributed downward through an 2204igitization and R19 was equally explicit that her directness is a considered choice rather than a personality default: “I lead unapologetically and directly. Diplomacy has its place, but this work has taught me that politeness alone rarely moves entrenched power.”

Taken together, the interview data support a genuinely contingent picture, consistent with Hersey and Blanchard’s (1969) situational leadership theory, but with two extensions that theory does not fully anticipate. First, the relevant “situation” is often a specific, bounded phase of a crisis rather than a stable team maturity level. Second, style is sometimes not adapted to a situation at all but chosen as a form of ethical or political commitment.

5.4 Theme Four: The Anatomy of Effective Traits Strategic Patience, Moral Courage, and Relational Intelligence

When asked directly what traits leadership effectiveness in this sector requires, the twenty respondents produced a list that clusters into a small number of families, and the clustering itself is informative because it does not closely track the trait lists most familiar from the general leadership literature.

The largest cluster is what might be called strategic patience: a capacity to sustain effort and judgement across long, uncertain timelines. R17 named “strategic patience and the ability to build trust across ideologically different stakeholders”; R02 listed it alongside “strong negotiation skills, and genuine comfort with ambiguity”; R15, early in a transition from field work to management, put it more simply as “patience and being willing to actually get your hands dirty, not just supervise from a distance.” This is a trait that the trait and behaviour integration literature (DeRue et al., 2011) tends to subsume under broader labels such as resilience or adaptability, but the interviews suggest it deserves separate standing: it is not simply about withstanding hardship, but about tolerating long, uncertain gaps between decision and visible consequence. A second cluster centres on integrity and moral courage, understood not as an abstract virtue but as the willingness to absorb concrete professional cost for the sake of honesty. R06 called it “intellectual honesty: the willingness to admit when a programme isn’t working” a disposition that depends directly on the kind of team psychological safety Edmondson (1999) identifies as a precondition for 2204igitization2204l learning behaviour. R09 tied it directly to procedural discipline in child protection work: “integrity beyond question, and the discipline to follow procedure even when it’s inconvenient.” R19 gave the sharpest formulation: “conviction, and the willingness to be disliked by people in power when the work demands it.” This family of traits maps closely onto the ethical leadership construct developed by Brown and Treviño (2006), who describe ethical leaders partly through their standing as a consistent “moral person” honest, principled, and the same in private as in professional conduct, even where that consistency is costly and onto the self awareness and 2204igitization moral perspective at the centre of Walumbwa et al.’s (2008) authentic leadership construct. A third, smaller but still distinct cluster is relational or emotional intelligence, named most directly by R11, who put “emotional intelligence, above almost everything else,” and echoed in R05’s pairing of

“commercial literacy combined with genuine empathy” and R14’s combination of “analytical rigor combined with genuine cultural sensitivity.”

5.5 Theme Five: The Field Headquarters Divide as a Structural Fault Line

Every one of the twenty respondents, when asked whether leadership varies at different levels of the 2205igitization, answered yes a level of agreement this study does not find on any other question. The content of that agreement, however, is where the finding becomes analytically useful, because a majority of respondents did not describe the field versus headquarters distinction as a neutral division of labour. They described it as a source of friction.

The clearest statement of the underlying pattern operational and trust based leadership at the field level against political and negotiation based leadership at senior levels comes from R01: “at the field level leadership is about trust and daily presence; at the top it becomes more about representation and negotiation.” R04, R09, and R17 each described a structurally identical split from technical/operational, governance/risk management, and programme/policy vantage points respectively, which suggests the pattern is not specific to any one function but close to a general feature of how this sector distributes leadership work by level. R13 added a normative edge: “I see far more genuine collaboration at junior levels and far more territorial behaviour, frankly, the higher up you go” a direct challenge to any assumption that participatory practice, once established at the grassroots level of an 2205igitization, simply diffuses upward. Read through the lens of leader member exchange theory (Graen & Uhl Bien, 1995), this divide can be understood as a difference in the *quality and basis* of the leadership relationship at each level trust based and dyadic at the field level, transactional and representational at the senior level rather than merely a difference in leaders’ personal style. The field headquarters divide is experienced by at least some leaders in terms of proximity to the people served, which this study’s respondents consistently identify as central to how the sector defines leadership success.

5.6 Theme Six: Followership Expectations Presence, Congruence, and Advocacy as the Currency of Trust

Asked what people expect of their leaders in this sector, respondents’ answers cluster tightly around three expectations that recur regardless of sub sector: physical or relational presence, congruence between what a leader says publicly and what they do internally, and an advocacy or protective role toward followers and beneficiaries against external pressure.

Presence is the most concretely stated of the three. R01 said people expect leaders “to be visible: to show up in the community, not just issue instructions from a head office three states away.” R08 made the same expectation explicit and urgent in a crisis context: leaders should be “present physically during the crisis, not managing it remotely from a briefing room.” Congruence consistency between a leader’s stated values and their internal conduct was named repeatedly and with some force, and maps directly onto the “ability” and “integrity” dimensions of trust identified by Mayer et al. (1995). R06 said followers expect leadership “to be honest about what is and isn’t working, not just present success stories to donors.” R09 generalised this into an absolute standard appropriate to child protection work specifically: “absolute consistency between what leaders say publicly and how they act internally.” The third expectation that leaders advocate for or shield their followers and beneficiaries carries the clearest normative charge of the three. R05 described her role explicitly as protective: followers expect her “to shield them from corporate pressure to show instant, flashy outcomes.” R07 put the same expectation in more combative terms: people expect leaders in this space “to actually fight for them, not just represent them politely in a meeting.” R19 extended the expectation beyond the 2205igitization into the public sphere: survivors and communities “expect leaders to actually show up for them publicly, not just in private meetings.”

What the interviews add beyond the general trust and psychological safety literature is the weight placed on physical presence specifically, which has less standing in trust models built around corporate or bureaucratic settings, where a leader’s physical absence from a subordinate’s daily work is normal and unremarkable.

5.7 Theme Seven: Gender and Leadership Decoupling Competence from Opportunity

Questions eight, nine, and ten dealt explicitly with gender, and because the three questions were asked in sequence first about comparative competence, then about fairness of opportunity, then about specific barriers the framework matrix allows these three questions to be read as a single, internally consistent argument rather than as three separate opinions.

On comparative competence (Q8), fourteen of the twenty respondents explicitly rejected the idea that leadership ability is gender determined. R01 said, “I don’t think gender decides that.” R06 added, “I really don’t see a gender pattern in who... leads better. It’s an individual trait, not a gendered one.” R14 added that “I have not seen a consistent performance difference by gender at all. Organisational culture matters far more than who is at the top.” This pattern is consistent with role congruity theory’s separation of *perceived competence* from *perceived fit* for a leadership role (Eagly & Karau, 2002): what makes this cluster analytically interesting rather than simply reassuring is that most of the fourteen respondents in this first group, in the same breath, offered a secondary, more specific observation about women leaders’ relational style, without apparently registering any tension between the two claims. R08 admitted the observation had personally surprised him: “some of the calmest, most decisive crisis leaders I’ve worked under have been women, which surprised me early in my career, I’ll admit.” R20 went furthest in offering a structural rather than innate explanation, noting that the most effective community level leaders he has worked with have often been women.

On fairness of opportunity (Q9), the pattern is far less divided. Not one of the twenty respondents gave an unqualified affirmation that women receive a fair chance at leadership roles in the sector. Responses ranged from cautiously qualified (R02: “within our 2206igitization, yes... but across the sector broadly, no”) to unqualified negation (R19: “absolutely not”; R13: “no, not yet, not even close, and I include our own sector in that, despite the language we use publicly”). What gives this unanimity real weight is the diversity of the respondents making it a pattern consistent with humanitarian sector evidence that under representation of women in senior roles persists even in organisations with explicit gender equity mandates (Patel et al., 2020; Meagher et al., 2023). This is not a finding confined to gender focused organisations, where one might expect heightened sensitivity to the issue: it comes with equal or greater force from a government officer (R10: postings “in remote, difficult districts are often not offered to women officers by default”), a disaster response commander (R16: leadership remains “visibly male dominated at the operational command level”), and an external consultant (R14: boards he has advised remain “disproportionately male, even at organisations doing excellent gender focused programme work”). A consistent secondary pattern within this unanimity is that fairness is reported as having genuinely improved at junior, field, and community levels, while a gap persists at senior, technical, financial, and regional or international levels. R04’s observation that “representation at the most senior regional levels is still heavily skewed towards men” could stand as a summary of a substantial share of the twenty responses to this question.

The barriers named in response to Q10 explain the mechanism behind that pattern rather than simply restating it. The most frequently named family of barriers involves competence stereotyping and language based double standards. R13 named the double standard directly, describing being “labelled ‘too aggressive’ for the exact behaviour that would get a male colleague called ‘assertive’ and promoted,” and R06 and R18 both described women colleagues being steered toward “soft skill” roles communications, relatable trainer roles rather than technical or data leadership positions, even when equally qualified. A closely related and similarly frequent barrier is mobility and safety based exclusion restrictions, often framed protectively, on women’s travel, field deployment, or remote postings named directly by R16, who observed that “physical risk assessments in our 2206igitization still sometimes restrict women from frontline deployment more than they restrict men.” A smaller but still recurring cluster involves the family and caregiving penalty: R09 described the difficulty of “balancing long international postings with family life, which affects women disproportionately given caregiving expectations at home,” a pattern consistent with the time based and strain based mechanisms of work–family conflict identified by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). The single most concrete piece of evidence in the entire dataset comes from R11, speaking from an HR vantage point, who described having personally seen a promotion file in which a woman was passed over because someone “wasn’t sure she’d be able to travel” after having children

a documented instance, not a general impression, of the caregiving penalty other respondents described in less specific terms. A final, smaller cluster involves exclusion from informal professional networks, named by R04 and R14, who described appointment shaping relationships built through “informal networking, golf course style relationship building” that women in the sector are more often excluded from a mechanism that closely parallels findings from outside the development sector showing that informal networks, rather than formal policy, are frequently the operative channel through which career relevant sponsorship and visibility are withheld from women (Horak & Suseno, 2022). This cluster of findings sits closer to structural and 2207igitization2207l barriers accounts of gendered leadership inequity than to trait based or leadership style explanations, and it directly complicates any simple reading of the participative leadership literature.

5.8 Theme Eight: Anticipated Futures Digitisation, Distributed Leadership, and the Wellbeing Turn

Asked to look a decade ahead, respondents converged on three broad trajectories, offered with noticeably different degrees of confidence. Five respondents (R03; R07; R12; R15; R19) explicitly framed at least part of their answer using the language of hope rather than prediction, a distinction the respondents drew themselves and one preserved in how the findings are reported here, rather than collapsing every forward looking statement into a single register of confident forecasting.

The most confidently stated trajectory is growing demand for data and technological fluency among leaders themselves, not merely among technical staff. R06 expects “data and even AI tools” to play a much larger role in field decision making, such that “leaders will need at least basic data fluency” as a baseline competency rather than a specialist skill. R08 and R16, both in emergency response, both expect greater reliance on early warning technology, but each was careful to preserve a place for human judgement at the point of crisis consistent with the balance between 2207igitization, time pressured decision making and later participatory adjustment documented in crisis leadership research (Bavik et al., 2021). R12 offered the clearest counterweight to this trend, hoping rather than predicting that “the next generation keeps the relationship based trust that built this sector, even as everything becomes more digital and metric driven.” The respondents who welcome 2207igitization most confidently, on this evidence, are not the same ones who built their careers on relational trust.

A second trajectory is a shift away from single 2207igitization, individually credited leadership toward distributed or coalition based leadership. R03 hopes the sector becomes “less dependent on one ‘hero’ leader and more about strong local teams that can carry on the work regardless of who is in charge” success defined by whether an 2207igitization survives its leader’s departure, a shift that aligns with the broader turn toward distributed leadership models identified in 2207igitization2207l leadership research more generally (Bolden, 2011). The third trajectory is a rising, explicit demand for staff wellbeing and 2207igitization2207l accountability to be treated as leadership responsibilities rather than administrative afterthoughts. R11 expects “much more investment in staff wellbeing and mental health support as a leadership priority, not an afterthought,” which directly echoes her earlier description of burnout as the sector’s most under addressed leadership challenge a concern well founded in the occupational health evidence on humanitarian worker burnout and psychological distress reviewed in Section 2.3 (Cardozo et al., 2012; Ager et al., 2012; Foo et al., 2023).

6. Discussion

6.1 Theoretical contributions

Four of the eight themes identify features of development sector leadership that existing, largely corporate derived leadership theory does not fully anticipate: the redefinition of success away from output metrics and toward mission fidelity and beneficiary outcome (Theme One); the sector’s distinctive multi principal, no market signal accountability structure (Theme Two); the treatment of leadership style as something constructed situationally, and sometimes ethically rather than innate (Theme Three); and the near unanimous identification of a field–headquarters divide that functions as a source of relational strain rather than a neutral division of labour (Theme Five). A fifth theme, on followership expectations (Theme Six), confirms and sharpens a trust based account of leadership consistent with Mayer et al.’s (1995) model, while adding a dimension physical presence that corporate and bureaucratic trust research has little occasion to theorise. A sixth theme, on effective traits (Theme

Four), populates DeRue et al.'s (2011) integrated trait behaviour framework with sector specific content strategic patience, moral courage, relational intelligence rather than displacing it. A seventh theme, on gender (Theme Seven), documents a striking gap between a near consensus that competence is not gender determined and a near unanimous acknowledgement that opportunity, in practice, still is, together with a partly evidenced account of the mechanisms mobility restriction, competence stereotyping, the caregiving penalty, and informal network exclusion that produce that gap, extending role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and informal network accounts of gendered exclusion (Horak & Suseno, 2022) into a sector where they have previously been under documented. An eighth theme, on the sector's anticipated future, identifies 2208igitization, distributed leadership, and a rising demand for staff wellbeing as the dominant expected trajectories, consistent with and extending into a new empirical setting existing work on distributed leadership (Bolden, 2011) and on the occupational health cost of humanitarian work (Cardozo et al., 2012; Foo et al., 2023).

Taken as a whole, the central theoretical contribution of this study is the identification of a beneficiary facing referee of leadership effectiveness that has no clean analogue in market based or single employer accounts of leadership: a constituency that is neither an employee nor a customer, yet whose changed circumstances these respondents treat as the ultimate test of whether their leadership has worked.

6.2 Practical implications

For development sector organisations, three implications follow directly from the findings. First, leadership development programmes in this sector should explicitly train for the phase dependent style switching described in Theme Three particularly in emergency response sub sectors rather than assuming a single "authentic" style is transferable across a crisis's acute and recovery phases. Second, the field headquarters divide identified in Theme Five is unlikely to be resolved by better communication alone if it is, as the data suggest, a difference in the underlying basis of the leadership relationship at each level (Graen & Uhl Bien, 1995); organisations may need to deliberately design senior roles that preserve field level relational contact rather than allowing seniority to convert leadership into a purely representational function. Third, the gender findings in Theme Seven point toward interventions that address the *mechanisms* documented here mobility restriction policy, informal network access, and caregiving related promotion penalties rather than competence building interventions aimed at women themselves, since the data show competence is not where the sector's own leaders locate the problem.

7. Methodological Limitations

Several limitations bear directly on how the findings in this paper should be read, and are stated here rather than left implicit.

First, all twelve questions asked respondents to 2208igitization their own leadership and their own sector, using retrospective self report. Respondents describing themselves as approachable, evidence driven, or humble are offering a self presentation, not a behaviour independently verified by their followers. This is a standard limitation of interview based leadership research generally (DeRue et al., 2011), and it cuts in a specific direction here: a leader's account of "successful leadership" may say as much about how that leader wants to be seen as about what their followers actually experience. Second, the sample, while deliberately heterogeneous by sub sector, is a purposive and snowball sample of twenty people, all with at least eight years of leadership experience. It is not, and does not claim to be, statistically representative of the development sector as a whole, and in particular it says little about the perspective of junior staff, who are the object of several respondents' claims about mentoring, burnout, and promotion practice a gap that mentoring research (Eby et al., 2008) suggests may be especially consequential for understanding how the network exclusion mechanisms identified in Theme Seven are actually experienced by those most affected rather than the source of any first hand account in this dataset. Third, the interviews were conducted at a single point in time, and several respondents were explicitly asked to speculate about the future of leadership in the sector. Those projections should be read as informed professional judgement rather than as data about what will actually happen. Fourth, saturation was assumed on the basis of prior empirical guidance (Guest et al., 2006; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022) rather than tested against a formal, study specific stopping criterion, consistent with the caution that saturation functions better as a planning heuristic than as a claim to be

verified after the fact (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Fifth, respondent or “member” checking of the final themes was not conducted (Birt et al., 2016); future replications of this design would strengthen credibility by returning 2209igitizati themes to a subset of respondents for confirmation or challenge. Sixth, no beneficiary, donor, or board level perspective is represented in the data; the study reports how development sector *leaders* construct effectiveness, not how it is experienced or evaluated by those they lead or serve.

8. Conclusion

This paper set out to answer a single question: what does leadership effectiveness in the development sector actually look like to the people expected to 2209igitiza it? Twenty interviews, analysed through a hybrid of Framework Analysis and reflexive thematic analysis, produced eight themes that together describe a form of leadership effectiveness assembled from mission fidelity rather than metric compliance, from a distinctive multi principal accountability structure rather than a single upward line, from consciously constructed rather than innate style, from a specific family of traits centred on strategic patience and moral courage, from a field–headquarters divide experienced as strain, from trust 2209igitizat around presence and congruence, from a persistent gap between perceived competence and actual opportunity for women, and from an anticipated future centred on 2209igitization, distributed leadership, and staff wellbeing. Read against corporate derived leadership theory, these findings extend rather than simply confirm existing constructs most notably by identifying a beneficiary facing referee of effectiveness that market based accounts have no occasion to theorise, and by documenting specific, partly evidenced mechanisms through which gendered opportunity restriction persists in a sector whose leaders overwhelmingly reject the premise that it should. Future research that incorporates beneficiary, junior staff, and longitudinal perspectives would extend this account considerably; the present study offers a first, practitioner grounded map of the terrain.

References:

- [1] AbouAssi, K., & Trent, D. L. (2016). NGO accountability from an NGO perspective: Perceptions, strategies, and practices. *Public Administration and Development*, 36(4), 283–296. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.1764>
- [2] Aboramadan, M., & Kundi, Y. M. (2020). Does transformational leadership better predict work related outcomes than transactional leadership in the NPO context? Evidence from Italy. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 31(6), 1254–1267. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-020-00278-7>
- [3] Ager, A., Pasha, E., Yu, G., Duke, T., Eriksson, C., & Lopes Cardozo, B. (2012). Stress, mental health, and burnout in national humanitarian aid workers in Gulu, northern Uganda. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 25(6), 713–720. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.21764>
- [4] Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1994). *Improving organizational effectiveness through transformational leadership*. Sage.
- [5] Bavik, Y. L., Shao, B., Newman, A., & Schwarz, G. (2021). Crisis leadership: A review and future research agenda. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 32(1), 101518. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2021.101518>
- [6] Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. M. (2016). Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1802–1811. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870>
- [7] Bolden, R. (2011). Distributed leadership in organizations: A review of theory and research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 13(3), 251–269. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2011.00306.x>
- [8] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- [9] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>

- [10] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). To saturate or not to saturate? Questioning data saturation as a useful concept for thematic analysis and sample size rationales. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 13(2), 201–216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1704846>
- [11] Brown, M. E., & Treviño, L. K. (2006). Ethical leadership: A review and future directions. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 17(6), 595–616. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2006.10.004>
- [12] Bigirinama, R. N., Makali, S. L., Mothupi, M. C., Chiribagula, C. Z., St Louis, P., Mwene Batu, P. L., Bisimwa, G. B., Mwembo, A. T., & Porignon, D. G. (2023). Ensuring leadership at the operational level of a health system in protracted crisis context: A cross sectional qualitative study covering 8 health districts in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. *BMC Health Services Research*, 23, 1348. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-023-10336-7>
- [13] Cardozo, B. L., Crawford, C. G., Eriksson, C., Zhu, J., Sabin, M., Ager, A., Foy, D., Snider, L., Scholte, W., Kaiser, R., Olf, M., Rijnen, B., & Simon, W. (2012). Psychological distress, depression, anxiety, and burnout among international humanitarian aid workers: A longitudinal study. *PLOS ONE*, 7(9), e44948. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0044948>
- [14] Chak, C. M., & Carminati, L. (2022). Effective leaders(hip) in community academic health partnership projects: An inductive, qualitative study. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 10, 941242. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.941242>
- [15] DeRue, D. S., Nahrgang, J. D., Wellman, N., & Humphrey, S. E. (2011). Trait and behavioral theories of leadership: An integration and meta analytic test of their relative validity. *Personnel Psychology*, 64(1), 7–52. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2010.01201.x>
- [16] Donnelly, J. H., Gibson, J. L., & Ivancevich, J. M. (1992). *Fundamentals of management* (8th ed.). Irwin.
- [17] DuBrin, A. J. (2008). *Leadership: Research findings, practice, and skills* (5th ed.). Houghton Mifflin.
- [18] Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109(3), 573–598. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.109.3.573>
- [19] Eby, L. T., Allen, T. D., Evans, S. C., Ng, T. W. H., & DuBois, D. L. (2008). Does mentoring matter? A multidisciplinary meta analysis comparing mentored and non mentored individuals. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 72(2), 254–267. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2007.04.005>
- [20] Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999>
- [21] Ejaz, I., Shaikh, B. T., & Rizvi, N. (2011). NGOs and government partnership for health systems strengthening: A qualitative study presenting viewpoints of government, NGOs and donors in Pakistan. *BMC Health Services Research*, 11, 122. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6963-11-122>
- [22] Eva, N., Robin, M., Sendjaya, S., van Dierendonck, D., & Liden, R. C. (2019). Servant leadership: A systematic review and call for future research. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 30(1), 111–132. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2018.07.004>
- [23] Foo, C. Y. S., Tay, A. K., Yang, Y., & Verdeli, H. (2023). Psychosocial model of burnout among humanitarian aid workers in Bangladesh: Role of workplace stressors and emotion coping. *Conflict and Health*, 17, 17. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-023-00512-1>
- [24] Gale, N. K., Heath, G., Cameron, E., Rashid, S., & Redwood, S. (2013). Using the framework method for the analysis of qualitative data in multi disciplinary health research. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 13, 117. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-13-117>

- [25] Graen, G. B., & Uhl Bien, M. (1995). Relationship based approach to leadership: Development of leader member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: Applying a multi level multi domain perspective. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 6(2), 219–247. [https://doi.org/10.1016/1048-9843\(95\)90036-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/1048-9843(95)90036-5)
- [26] Greenhaus, J. H., & Beutell, N. J. (1985). Sources of conflict between work and family roles. *Academy of Management Review*, 10(1), 76–88. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1985.4277352>
- [27] Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903>
- [28] Hennink, M., & Kaiser, B. N. (2022). Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests. *Social Science & Medicine*, 292, 114523. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114523>
- [29] Hersey, P., & Blanchard, K. H. (1969). Life cycle theory of leadership. *Training and Development Journal*, 23, 26–34.
- [30] Horak, S., & Suseno, Y. (2022). Informal networks, informal institutions, and social exclusion in the workplace: Insights from subsidiaries of multinational corporations in Korea. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 181, 617–633. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-022-05244-5>
- [31] Judge, T. A., & Piccolo, R. F. (2004). Transformational and transactional leadership: A meta analytic test of their relative validity. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(5), 755–768. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.89.5.755>
- [32] Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice*, 24(1), 120–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092>
- [33] Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2012). *The leadership challenge* (5th ed.). Jossey Bass.
- [34] Lafrenière, J., Sweetman, C., & Thylin, T. (2019). Introduction: Gender, humanitarian action and crisis response. *Gender & Development*, 27(2), 187–201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2019.1634332>
- [35] Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- [36] Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An integrative model of organizational trust. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 709–734. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9508080335>
- [37] Meagher, K., Khaity, M., Hafez, S., Rodo, M., El Achi, N., & Patel, P. (2023). Strengthening health systems and peacebuilding through women’s leadership: A qualitative study. *Globalization and Health*, 19, 1. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-023-00920-1>
- [38] Noble, E., Moinul, D., Djim Sylla, O. K., Friedmann, S., Amick, K., Rowhani, N., Dua, R., Mannan, N., Seaman, C., Ayo, O., Pant, S., Osoko, O., Gogineni, S., Malburg, C., Dickey, C., Peprah, E., Khan, A., Suthar, P., & Mahmoud, A. B. (2025). Downward accountability mechanism effectiveness by non governmental organizations in low and middle income countries: A qualitative systematic review. *PLOS ONE*, 20(5), e0324098. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0324098>
- [39] Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- [40] Patel, P., Meagher, K., El Achi, N., Ekzayez, A., Sullivan, R., & Bowsher, G. (2020). “Having more women humanitarian leaders will help transform the humanitarian system”: Challenges and opportunities for women leaders in conflict and humanitarian health. *Conflict and Health*, 14, 84. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-020-00330-9>
- [41] Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.

- [42] Ritchie, J., & Spencer, L. (1994). Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research. In A. Bryman & R. G. Burgess (Eds.), *Analyzing qualitative data* (pp. 173–194). Routledge.
- [43] Schnable, A., Appe, S., & Buyannemekh, B. (2025). Opportunities for downward accountability? Survey evidence from small transnational NGOs. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 35(4), 799–811. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21645>
- [44] Shiva, M. S. A. M., & Suar, D. (2012). Transformational leadership, organizational culture, organizational effectiveness, and programme outcomes in non governmental organizations. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 23(3), 684–710. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-011-9230-4>
- [45] Spreitzer, G. M. (1995). Psychological empowerment in the workplace: Dimensions, measurement, and validation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(5), 1442–1465. <https://doi.org/10.5465/256865>
- [46] Stutzman, M. (2016). *Leadership success or failure: Understanding the difference between leadership career success and true leadership effectiveness* [Doctoral dissertation, Northcentral University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- [47] Teame, K., Debie, A., & Tullu, M. (2022). Healthcare leadership effectiveness among managers in public health institutions of Addis Ababa, Central Ethiopia: A mixed methods study. *BMC Health Services Research*, 22, 526. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-022-07879-6>
- [48] Tran, L. (2020). International NGO centralization and leader perceived effectiveness. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 49(1), 134–159. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764019861741>
- [49] Walumbwa, F. O., Avolio, B. J., Gardner, W. L., Wernsing, T. S., & Peterson, S. J. (2008). Authentic leadership: Development and validation of a theory based measure. *Journal of Management*, 34(1), 89–126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206307308913>