Network Leadership Theory: A New Research Agenda

Hanna Shvindina, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0883-8361

American University Kyiv, SBA, Ukraine; Doctor of Economics, Professor, Oleg Balatskyi Department of Management, BiEM, Sumy State University, Ukraine

Inna Balahurovska, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3642-9506

PhD Student, Oleg Balatskyi Department of Management, BiEM, Sumy State University, Ukraine

Iryna Heiets, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1267-3790

PhD, Associate Professor, RMIT University, Australia

Abstract

As a social phenomenon and a mechanism for influencing others, leadership always has interested scientists. Literary reviews on the theoretical foundations, types of classifications, and prospects for leadership development are an essential element of careful study of this concept. Today, the systematization of types of leadership on various grounds is a necessary component for understanding the nature of this phenomenon. The paper analyzes 2,000 published research papers from the Scopus database, identifying critical terms related to leadership. Establishing links between leadership and related concepts creates the most accurate picture for further research on this topic. The study is devoted to studying the theoretical and practical experience of scientists worldwide who research management as a critical aspect in building an effective organization. Systematization of such data is the basis for identifying current and fundamentally new directions of effective leadership. The keyword in the described bibliometric analysis was the concept of "leadership". New clusters have been formed with the most influential definitions of transformational leadership, communication, and shared leadership. The combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods determined the future directions of study in the further search for effective leadership tools. The content analysis of the most cited scientific works was carried out in the research, which reveals the essence of tools for the development of effective leadership and the need for timely diagnosis of the negative behavior of managers. Bibliometric analysis and analysis of the development of leadership theory reveal the need to implement the principles of Network Leadership Theory in modern organizations, which are the basis of the state's economic development as a whole.

Cite as: Shvindina, H., Balahurovska, I., Heiets, I. (2022). Network Leadership Theory: A New Research Agenda. *Business Ethics and Leadership, 6*(1), 25-32. http://doi.org/10.21272/bel.6(1).25-32.2022.

Introduction

The leadership phenomenon keeps fascinating scholars and practitioners all around the world. The number of papers in the field increases, and new types of leadership appear. This trend relates to the changes in the socio-economic systems, which lead to constant changes in management processes. Leadership is a key component in the economic and social processes of any system, whether it is an organization, state, or a small business. The effectiveness of any unit depends on leaders who unite tangible and intangible resources with measurable processes, leading the team to expected outcomes. Network leadership is a promising direction in management studies as this system allows to achieve the anticipated results and build a lean organization. This approach to management requires more careful research and understanding of the tools for its implementation.

ARMG Publishing
"Thinking ahead"

Literature Review

The study reflects the data from bibliometric analysis of 2000 scientific publications indexed by the Scopus database during 2017-2021. The most cited papers of scientists who have studied the concept of leadership from different points of view became the background of current research. Various forms of leadership have been studied: inspirational leadership (Levecque, K. et al., 2017), creative leadership (Dong, Y. et al., 2016), servant leadership (Eva, N. et al., 2019), positive leadership (Luthans, F. et al., 2017), green transformational leadership (Singh, S.K. et al., 2020), leadership upon creativity and innovation (Hughes, D. et al., 2018), abusive leadership (Mackey, J.D. et al., 2015; Tepper, B. et al., 2017). Ethical norms of leadership are described in (Hoch, J.E. et al., 2016; Donthu, N. et al., 2020) and its dark side (Williams, T.A. et al., 2017). Scholars also pay attention to ethical norms of leadership (Hoch, J.E. et al., 2016; Donthu N. et al., 2020). The main tasks of the leader are considered as staff involvement (Bailey, C. et al., 2015), positive organization orientation (Kurtessis, J.N. et al., 2015), Corporate Social Responsibility (McGuinness, P. et al., 2017), professional challenges as a driving force in the career (Miron-Spektor, E. et al., 2018), motivation (Deci, E.L. et al., 2017). Among others, researchers identified tools for leadership development − the use of business logic (Kowalkowski, C. et al., 2017) and "popularity" on Instagram (De Veirman, et al., 2017).

Methodology and Research Methods

The tool for bibliometric analysis VOSviewer is used in the article. It helps select 2,000 scientific publications from the Scopus database using the keyword "leadership" for the period 2017-2021. As a result, there were seven formed clusters that are related to "leadership". Using VOSviewer, three visualizations were created. Network visualization shows links between a key concept and related categories. Overlay visualization shows the density of relationships between concepts. The Density visualization scheme reveals the most researched concepts and categories that need further study. The content analysis of the evolution of terms in the research field was based on the 20 most cited scientific papers on the proposed topic, and the areas for future research were identified.

Results

Two thousand scientific publications indexed by the Scopus database during 2017-2021 were selected to study the theoretical principles of the concept of "leadership" using the basic search with keywords (titles, abstracts). Based on the bibliometric analysis results of current scientific publications indexed by the Scopus database in 2017-2021 using the VOSviewer toolkit, a thesaurus (38 terms) was visualized to determine the link between the concept of "leadership" and related categories. Seven clusters marked in green, red, yellow, blue, turquoise, purple and orange were identified. Selected clusters can be named Leadership Style (red), Organizational Management (green), Ad Hoc Leadership (blue), Paternalistic & Authoritarian Leadership (yellow), Network Leadership Theory (purple), Strategic Management (turquoise), Opportunistic Leadership Behavior/Abusive Leadership (orange).

The results of bibliometric analysis, namely Network visualization between the key concept and the related categories, are presented in Fig. 1.

Figure 1. Network Visualization of Leadership Connected with Other Concepts

Source: Scopus database, constructed by authors for the keyword "leadership", 2000 documents, 2017-2021, 38 items (terms)

If the frequency of mentioning a particular concept as a keyword increase, it reflects on the size in the circle's diameter, as is shown in Fig. 1.

Table 1. The Clusters and the Concepts According to the Results of Bibliometric Analysis

Cluster 1. Leadership Style	Ambidextrous leadership
	Emotional intelligence
	Leadership style
	Leadership styles
	Organizational climate
	Organizational culture
	Organizational structure
	Transactional leadership
	Transformational leadership
Cluster 2. Organizational Management	Employee
	Leadership
	Leadership development
	Management
	Motivation
	Organization
	Organization and management
	Total quality management
Cluster 3. Ad Hoc Leadership	Authentic leadership
	Critical leadership studies
	Ethical leadership
	Manager
	Servant leadership
	Spiritual leadership
	Workplace
Cluster 4. Paternalistic & Authoritarian Leadership	Authoritarian leadership
	Communication
	Leader-member exchange
	Paternalistic leadership
Cluster 5. Network Leadership Theory	Distributed leadership
	Empowering leadership
	Instructional leadership
	Shared leadership
Cluster 6. Strategic Management	Environmental management
	Managers
	Strategic leadership
	Top management teams
Cluster 7. Opportunistic Leadership Behavior/Abusive Leadership	Abusive supervision
	Job satisfaction

Source: Scopus database, constructed by authors for the keyword 'leadership', 2000 documents, 2017-2021, 38 items (terms)

Cluster 1. Leadership Style consists of concepts defining the behavior of the leader with subordinates. The specific nature of this cluster is that the study of issues related to leadership style is a key element in management in the formation of a competitive organization. *Transformational leadership* is the most often mentioned term while studying the phenomenon of leadership.

Cluster 2. Organizational Management includes the keywords "leadership", and "leadership development", besides others. Over some time, the study of basic concepts provides a complete picture of leadership theory development. This cluster includes such blocks as, Employee, Leadership, Leadership Development, Management, Motivation, Organization, Organization and Management, Total Quality Management. The most exploratory concept is related to the study of organizations where it is conducted.

Cluster 3. Ad hoc Leadership covers issues related to follow-up leadership. Socio-psychological methods of the leader's influence on subordinates are described. Meta-analysis of the concepts of Critical, Ethical, Servant, and Spiritual leadership allows us to conclude that the manager needs to implement these methods working with a team.

Communication is a central concept in **Cluster 4. Paternalistic & Authoritarian Leadership**. It is interesting fact that this cluster unites paternalistic and authoritarian leadership, the connection between them is needed to be discussed further. Above that, there is a link between mentioned and communications in the organization, and leader-member exchange.

Cluster 5. Network Leadership Theory examines areas related to the principles of Distributed leadership, Empowering leadership, Instructional leadership, Shared leadership. According to the current bibliometric analysis, the Network Leadership Theory has not been sufficiently studied. The Shared leadership block is marked on the diagram with the circle with the largest diameter, i.e., it is most often mentioned next to the key concept "leadership".

Cluster 7. Opportunistic Leadership Behavior/Abusive Leadership is intermediate. It focuses on studying the manifestations of leaders' destructive behavior. The concept of job satisfaction is a qualitative indicator of the manager's effectiveness. According to the bibliometric analysis results dated from 2017 to 2021, Overlay visualization allows observing that in 2018 the terms leadership, transformational leadership, communication, strategic leadership, and the dark side of leadership became relevant. Research on Ethical leadership dates to 2017. A new trend since 2019 is Network Leadership Theory. The chronology of the terms' appearance is presented as a part of the bibliometric analysis in Figure 2.
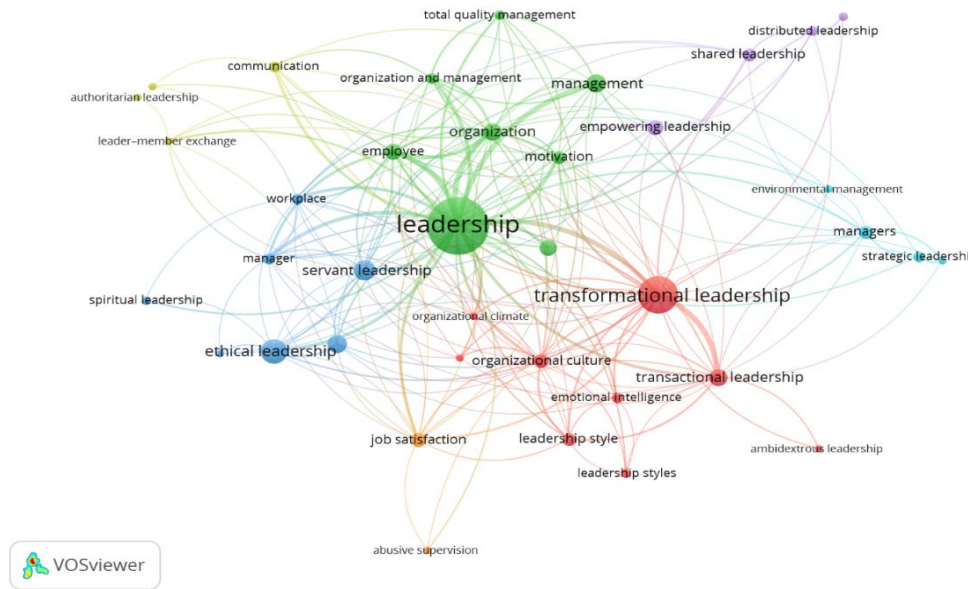

Figure 2. Overlay Visualization of Leadership Connected with Other Concepts

Source: Scopus database, constructed by authors for the keyword 'leadership', 2000 documents, 2017-2021, 38 items (terms)

The next stage of the study is Density Visualization of the concept "leadership" and its links with other categories. Figure 3 shows the results of that visualization. The diagram shows two colors indicating the

density of connections between the concepts − yellow and green. The brightest yellow circle around leadership, transformational leadership, and ethical leadership indicates the research intensity on these topics. Then the color becomes duller, which means a decrease in the number of studies related to these categories, such as Communication, Shared Leadership, Strategic Leadership, Abusive Supervision.

Figure 3. Density Visualization of Leadership Connected with Other Concepts

Source: Scopus database, constructed by authors for the keyword 'leadership', 2000 documents, 2017-2021, 38 items (terms)

Thus, clusters with dull colors contain concepts that need future research. In our opinion, the most relevant issues today relate to Network Leadership Theory. It is due to the fact that economic phenomena in developing countries need leaders who are focused on the social component of the organization such as team, staff, followers.

Table 2. Content Analysis Regarding the Evolution of Terms in the Field of Research (generalized for 20 Most Cited Papers)

Source	Number of citations	Research focus	Challenges for the future research
1. Kurtessis, J.N., Eisenberger, R., Ford, M.T., Buffardi, L.C., Stewart, K.A., & Adis, C.S. (2015)	521	Leadership, organizational context, positive orientation toward the organization, and employee well-being	Exploring the relationship between psychological well-being and performance
2. Deci, E.L., Olafsen, A.H., & Ryan, R.M. (2017)	499	Motivation, volitional engagement of employees and customers	Longitudinal research of leadership with objective measures
3. De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017)	394	Perceptions of popularity	The study of the qualitative composition of the audience to achieve popularity
4. Hoch, J.E., Bommer, W.H., Dulebohn, J.H., & Wu, D. (2016)	348	Linking ethics-based forms of leadership with transformational leadership	Strengthening the effectiveness of transformational leadership through a moral or ethical dimension
5. Donthu, N., & Gustafsson, A. (2020)	325	Studying ethical issues related to employees and leadership	Exploring Technology Readiness and Value Chains visibility for users and followers
6. Levecque, K., Anseel, F., De Beuckelaer, A., Van der Heyden, J., & Gisle, L. (2017)	278	Relationship between career and family, mental health, and leadership style	Examining the relationship between a lack of inspirational leadership and the occurrence of mental health problems in the education sphere

ARMG PUBLISHING
"Thinking ahead"

Table 2 (cont.). Content Analysis Regarding the Evolution of Terms in the Field of Research (generalized for 20 Most Cited Papers)

7. Williams, T.A., Gruber, D.A., Sutcliffe, K.M., Shepherd, D.A., & Zhao, E.Y. (2017)	274	Dark side of resilience	The study of the conditions under which resilience can create the basis for subsequent destruction
8. Luthans, F., & Youssef-Morgan, C. M. (2017)	273	Positive leadership	The role of positivity as a valuable capital resource at different levels - for individuals, teams, and organizations
9. Mackey, J.D., Frieder, R.E., Brees, J.R., & Martinko, M.J. (2015)	269	Abusive Supervision	The conceptualization of the boundaries of justice theory
10. Bailey, C., Madden, A., Alfes, K., & Fletcher, L. (2015)	264	The link between the levels of engagement and organizational performance, and individual well-being	Detailed analysis of engagement, its outcomes, and drivers
11. Dong, Y., Bartol, K.M., Zhang, Z.-X., & Li, C. (2016)	258	Utility of dual-focused transformational leadership in the creative realm, creative leadership, individual creativity	The measurement of the transformational leadership influence at boosting creativity at multiple levels
12. Eva, N., Robin, M., Sendjaya, S., van Dierendonck, D., & Liden, R.C. (2019)	252	Servant Leadership	Study of conceptual and empirical overlap between servant leadership and transformational leadership
13. Hughes, D. J., Lee, A., Tian, A. W., Newman, A., & Legood, A. (2018)	222	Creativity and innovation, leadership upon creativity and innovation	To build a more precise understanding of which leader behaviors are most important and to identify the mechanisms through which these leader behaviors influence creativity and innovation
14. Singh, S.K., Giudice, M.D., Chierici, R., & Graziano, D. (2020)	214	Green human resource management, green transformational leadership, green innovation and environmental performance	Creation of a model of perception of "green" innovations and environmental performance
15. McGuinness, P. B., Vieito, J.P., & Wang, M. (2017)	193	Corporate Social Responsibility	Assessment of leadership effects in different market conditions
16. Miron-Spektor, E., Ingram, A., Keller, J., Smith, W.K., & Lewis, M.W. (2018)	190	Competing tensions and demands pervade our workforce as a driving force.	Approaches to the study of tensions and to uncover individual variations
17. Kim, A., Kim, Y., Han, K., Jackson, S. E., & Ployhart, R.E. (2014)	182	Monitoring behavior and giving feedback	Methods for encouraging environmentally-friendly behavior
18. Tepper, B.J., Simon, L., & Park, H.M. (2017)	185	Abusive Supervision	Conducting experiments in the field of abusive behavior of the leader
19. Kowalkowski, C., Gebauer, H., Kamp, B., & Parry, G. (2017)	183	Leadership and business logic	Exploring priorities in choosing growth paths
20. Lee, K., & Malerba, F. (2017)	182	Catch-up cycle	Ways of development catch-up style and catch-up opportunities.

Source: Compiled by authors

Thus, the authors of the most cited work (Kurtessis, J.N. et al., 2015) consider the impact of positive orientation in the enterprise on employee's well-being as a prospect for future research on the relationship between psychological well-being and employee productivity. While observing the staff motivation, researchers (Deci, E.L. et al., 2017) suppose that it is necessary to study the management evolution further. Describing the criterion of "popularity" on Instagram, De Veirman M., and co-authors (De Veirman et al., 2017) suggest the topic of qualitative understanding of the audience as a trend of leadership development.

Hoch J.E. and colleagues (Hoch, J.E. et al., 2016) describe how ethical forms of leadership relate to transformational leadership and consider it necessary to explore further how transformational governance can be strengthened. Other authors in 2020 (Donthu, N. et al., 2020) described ethical norms in the behavior of business participants and suggested paying attention to the technological readiness to create value in the

future. A study by Levecque K. (Levecque, K. et al., 2017) on the combination of career and family on the example of graduate students identified the need to study the inspired leadership principles among people involved in science. Examining the dark side of leadership (Williams, T.A. et al., 2017), it was concluded that sustainability in the organization is not always a positive criterion for evaluating its performance. Researchers (Luthans F. et al., 2017) emphasize that the positive is a valuable asset for the social component of the organization while studying positive leadership.

Research in Abusive Supervision (Mackey, J.D. et al., 2015) develops the Theory of the boundaries of justice, which aims to form sound governance principles. Bailey C. and co-authors (Bailey, C. et al., 2015) paid attention to the development of staff involvement, which will resonate in the study of quantitative indicators of this phenomenon. The theoretical model of creative leadership (Dong, Y. et al., 2016) is important in studying transformational leadership. Eva N. and colleagues (Eva, N. et al., 2019) also described the transformational leadership principles and concluded that Servant Leadership plays a unique role in effective management styles.

Leadership upon creativity and innovation (Hughes, D. et al., 2018) is a condition of modern management and requires the study of mechanisms for its implementation. The results of research in green transformational leadership (Singh, S.K. et al., 2020) can be the basis for creating a model of perception of "green" innovations. Scientists (McGuinness, P. et al., 2017) confirm that for effective management, Corporate Social Responsibility must be developed in organizations of various forms of ownership.

Researchers (Miron-Spektor, E. et al., 2018) describe how professional challenges can drive a career. Turning to the definition of Abusive Supervision (Tepper, B. et al., 2017), it becomes clear that it is necessary to study this issue through behavioral experiments. Looking at leadership in business processes, we can state that in determining organization development, one should consider the business logic principles (Kowalkowski, C. et al., 2017). Lee K. and colleagues (Lee, K. et al., 2017) describe the Catch-up cycle of organizations and the possibilities to build the organizational systems based on the definition of so-called "windows of opportunities".

Conclusions

Based on the bibliometric and content analysis results and considering the principles of Network Leadership Theory, we can state that it is a promising area in the further development of management science. Network leadership aims to develop the potential of staff. The leader's focus on human resources ensures the efficient operation of the enterprise and makes it competitive. The formation of responsibility in each team member develops competent and influential followers. The presented research shows that the issues of Network Leadership Theory are insufficiently studied. However, there is a need for a more in-depth analysis of the mechanisms and tools for implementing the Network Leadership Theory. Since there are different areas of activity that have their properties and are fundamentally different from specific tasks and features in management, there is a need for a clear understanding of how the principles of Network Leadership Theory will be practical.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization: Balahurovska Inna and Shvindina Hanna; methodology: Shvindina Hanna; software: Balahurovska Inna; validation: Shvidina Hanna; formal analysis: Shvidina Hanna; investigation: Balahurovska Inna; writing-original draft preparation: Balahurovska Inna; writing-review and editing: Shvindina Hanna; visualization: Balahurovska Inna; supervision: Shvindina Hanna.

References

1. Bailey, C., Madden, A., Alfes, K., & Fletcher, L. (2015). The Meaning, Antecedents and Outcomes of Employee Engagement: A Narrative Synthesis. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 19*(1), 31-53. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]
2. De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: the impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International Journal of Advertising, 36*(5), 798-828. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]
3. Deci, E.L., Olafsen, A.H., & Ryan, R.M. (2017). Self-Determination Theory in Work Organizations: The State of a Science. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 4*(1), 19-43. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]
4. Dong, Y., Bartol, K.M., Zhang, Z.X., & Li, C. (2016). Enhancing employee creativity via individual skill

development and team knowledge sharing: Influences of dual-focused transformational leadership. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 38*(3), 439-458. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]

5. Donthu, N., & Gustafsson, A. (2020). Effects of COVID-19 on business and research. *Journal of Business Research, 117*, 284-289. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]

6. 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. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]

7. Hoch, J.E., Bommer, W.H., Dulebohn, J.H., & Wu, D. (2016). Do Ethical, Authentic, and Servant Leadership Explain Variance Above and Beyond Transformational Leadership? A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Management, 44*(2), 501-529. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]

8. Hughes, D.J., Lee, A., Tian, A.W., Newman, A., & Legood, A. (2018). Leadership, creativity, and innovation: A critical review and practical recommendations. *The Leadership Quarterly, 29*(5), 549-569. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]

9. Kim, A., Kim, Y., Han, K., Jackson, S.E., & Ployhart, R.E. (2014). Multilevel Influences on Voluntary Workplace Green Behavior: Individual Differences, Leader Behavior, and Coworker Advocacy. *Journal of Management, 43*(5), 1335-1358. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]

10. Kowalkowski, C., Gebauer, H., Kamp, B., & Parry, G. (2017). Servitization and deservitization: Overview, concepts, and definitions. *Industrial Marketing Management, 60*, 4-10. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]

11. Kurtessis, J.N., Eisenberger, R., Ford, M.T., Buffardi, L.C., Stewart, K.A., & Adis, C.S. (2015). Perceived Organizational Support: A Meta-Analytic Evaluation of Organizational Support Theory. *Journal of Management*, *43*(6), 1854-1884. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]

12. Lee, K. & Malerba, F. (2017). Catch-up cycles and changes in industrial leadership: Windows of opportunity and responses of firms and countries in the evolution of sectoral systems. *Research Policy, 46*(2), 338-351. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]

13. Levecque, K., Anseel, F., De Beuckelaer, A., Van der Heyden, J., & Gisle, L. (2017). Work organization and mental health problems in PhD students. *Research Policy, 46*(4), 868-879. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]

14. Luthans, F. & Youssef-Morgan, C.M. (2017). Psychological Capital: An Evidence-Based Positive Approach. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 4*(1), 339-366. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]

15. Mackey, J.D., Frieder, R.E., Brees, J.R., & Martinko, M.J. (2015). Abusive Supervision: A Meta-Analysis and Empirical Review. *Journal of Management, 43*(6), 1940-1965. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]

16. McGuinness, P.B., Vieito, J.P., & Wang, M. (2017). The role of board gender and foreign ownership in the CSR performance of Chinese listed firms. *Journal of Corporate Finance, 42*, 75-99. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]

17. Miron-Spektor, E., Ingram, A., Keller, J., Smith, W.K., & Lewis, M.W. (2018). Microfoundations of Organizational Paradox: The Problem Is How We Think about the Problem. *Academy of Management Journal, 61*(1), 26-45. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]

18. Singh, S.K., Giudice, M.D., Chierici, R., & Graziano, D. (2020). Green innovation and environmental performance: The role of green transformational leadership and green human resource management. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change, 150*, 119762. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]

19. Tepper, B.J., Simon, L., & Park, H.M. (2017). Abusive Supervision. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 4*(1), 123-152. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]

20. Williams, T.A., Gruber, D.A., Sutcliffe, K.M., Shepherd, D.A., & Zhao, E.Y. (2017). Organizational Response to Adversity: Fusing Crisis Management and Resilience Research Streams. *Academy of Management Annals, 11*(2), 733-769. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]