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AGILE LEADERSHIP - A COMPARISON OF AGILE LEADERSHIP STYLES

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Abstract Leadership has been the focus of research in the social sciences since the early 1930s. However, no generally valid theory exists to date. In recent years, theories relating to agile leadership have also increasingly emerged. The aim of this paper is to give an overview of the current state of research on agile leadership. For this purpose, a systematic literature analysis is conducted. The different terms used in the context of agile leadership are restricted by means of selection criteria. Furthermore, characteristics of agile leadership will be analyzed and consolidated. This results in a catalogue of criteria with which the selected leadership styles. The evaluation shows that there are overlaps in the styles, which also can be identified in the research.

Keywords:
agile,
leadership,
literature
review,
comparison,
research
paper.

1 Introduction

"Agility" has increasingly become a trend word in recent years. More and more organizations are trying to become "agile" and implement agile corporate structures. This refers not only to the processes and structures they adopt, but also to the way leadership is designed (Joiner & Josephs, 2007, p. 35). Leadership is a concept that is constantly evolving as a result of social changes and their impact on the world of work and expectations of the role of a leader (West, 2004, p. 28). There is no generally valid theory of leadership (Bolden, 2004, p. 3). Rather, researchers, academics, and consultants have introduced a wide variety of definitions and concepts of leadership over the years, some of which differ only slightly from one another. In recent years, a variety of theories on agile leadership have appeared in academia and in practice. The unmanageable amount of theories and terms concerning (agile) leadership makes a uniform understanding of the concept difficult.

In this context, this paper gives an overview of the current state of research on agile leadership. The relevant leadership concepts are identified, presented, compared and similarities and differences are highlighted.

For the development of an overview of the current state of research, a five-step systematic literature analysis according to vom Brocke et al (2009) was chosen. First the scope of the literature search according to Cooper (1988, p. 109) is defined. The second chapter thus provides a theoretical basis as well as an overview of the terms. The third chapter, is the literature analysis and synthesis, and forms the core of the present work. For this purpose, the literature on the different agile leadership styles and concepts is systematically compiled and analyzed. The work is rounded off by the creation of a research agenda based on the results of the previous steps. The aim is to identify research gaps in the existing literature on agile leadership and possible questions for future research.

2 Conceptual Background – Leadership

In the literature there are many attempts by scientists to define the term leadership. According to Bass (2008), the search for a single definition of leadership is futile, as the definition depends on the researcher's interest and the nature of the problem or situation. In an integrative approach, Winston and Patterson (2006) examined 160 articles in a meta-study, whereupon the authors identified 91 dimensions of leadership. The high number of dimensions shows the complexity of the concept and that a large number of aspects must be taken into account when defining leadership. The view that leadership requires the consideration of different perspectives is supported by other researchers. For example, the authors of the book "What is Leadership?" propose to consider leadership on five levels (Grint, Jones, Holt, & Storey, 2016, p. 4). Leadership can thus be considered in terms of the person (you are a leader if you have followers), the outcome, the process, the purpose, or the position. The authors conclude that leadership contains all five levels and at the same time none of them (Grint et al., 2016, p. 16). Thus, it is assumed that leadership is a complex construct that allows much freedom for subjective interpretations.

Definition of Leadership: First traditional approaches to leadership are based on the characteristics of a leader (Robbins & Judge, 2010, p. 369). Thus, the innate personality was originally seen as the crucial difference between a leader and a non-leader. Stogdill (1950, p. 11) described the purpose of the leadership process in terms of achieving common goals. Kotter (1988) also regarded leadership as a process, but in his definition took into account the use of non-coercive means. He defined leadership as "a process of moving a group (or groups) in a certain direction with mostly non-coercive means". For this purpose, he said, a leader was required to design and share a vision (Handy, 1992). After research had considered leadership as a set of characteristics, processes, or specific behaviors, the understanding was expanded to include another aspect, that of contingency theory (Robbins & Judge, 2010, p. 373). Based on the results of the literature review, the working definition of leadership in this paper is as follows: Leadership refers to all aspects (goal, role, position, process) of influencing a group in a particular context to achieve a vision or set of goals.

Working definition of Agile Leadership: Since literature provides no uniform understanding of agile leadership and its embodied different aspects: We view agile

leadership as a way of thinking and attitude, as role and characteristics of the (agile) leader, as leadership of agile teams, or as leadership practices and processes. The working definition of agile leadership, which is derived from the definitions of terms and literature analysis, is defined as follows Agile Leadership encompasses those mindsets, leadership styles and practices, as well as the characteristics and competencies of leaders, which are designed to support a rapid response of an organization to changing environmental conditions and are therefore particularly suitable for the leadership of organizations with flat hierarchies. The literature analysis shows that the number of leadership styles associated with agile leadership is large. However, it shows that many terms are not established concepts. In contrast to leadership in traditional companies, the perspective moves away from the process view towards people and their characteristics (Table 1).

Table 1: Leadership in hierachical vs. agile Organizations

Levels	Leadership in hierarchical organizations	Leadership in agile organizations
<i>Mindset/ Attitude</i>	Increased efficiency and clear division of tasks for maximum output	Understanding environmental change as a permanent state
<i>Leadership role</i>	Decision maker, sole responsibility of the leader	Empowering the team, creating appropriate conditions, shared responsibility
<i>Team organization</i>	Clear hierarchical positions and distribution of roles between leader and follower, responsibility at Leader	Self-organized teams, flat hierarchies, independent working methods, focus on collaboration, shared responsibility
<i>Management practice</i>	Process view, sequence of different activities	Common vision, teamwork, collaboration, simple rules, open flow of information (e.g. through Scrum, Kanban or Lean Management)

3 Methodology

In this chapter, agile leadership styles are identified and compared using a structured catalogue of criteria. The goal is to show similarities and differences between different agile leadership styles and to critically question them.

3.1 Selection of Agile Leadership Styles

The extensive literature research provides numerous leadership styles that are relevant in the context of agility.

Table 2: Different Leadership Styles

The new deal at the top (NDT)	Visionary Leadership (VIL)
Servant Leadership (SEL)	Situational Leadership (SIL)
Transformational Leadership (TFL)	Transactional Leadership (TRL)
Promise-based Leadership (PBL)	The connected Leader (TCL)
Shared Leadership (SHL)	E-Leadership (ELE)
Agility and absorption (AAA)	Complexity Leadership (COL)
Executive as a coach (EXC)	Distributed Leadership (DIL)
Emergent Leadership (EML)	Digital Leadership (DGL)

In a next step, the knowledge gained is narrowed down using selection criteria. The aim is to analyse only those leadership styles that meet certain formal and content-related requirements. Specifically, it is examined whether the search results of the listed leadership styles meet the following criteria (see Table 3):

Table 3: Selection Criteria Leadership Styles

1	Scientific style of the published work (WS)
2	Reference to the definition of agile leadership (FC)
3	Mentioned in mind. four peer-reviewed scientific paper (WA)

The selection process based on the criteria defined in Table 3 results in a narrowing of leadership styles from 17 to ten. The detailed literature search is shown in Appendix I. Specifically, the leadership styles Servant Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Shared Leadership, Emergent Leadership, Visionary Leadership,

Situational Leadership, e-Leadership, Complexity Leadership, and Distributed Leadership fulfill the defined selection criteria (see Table 4).

Table 4: Selection of Leadership Theories

Leadership Theories	WS	BZ	WA	Criteria fulfilled (Yes/No)
Servant Leadership (SEL)	x	x	x	Yes
Transformational Leadership (TFL)	x	x	x	Yes
Shared Leadership (SHL)	x	x	x	Yes
Emergent Leadership (EML)	x	x	x	Yes
Visionary Leadership (VIL)	x	x	x	Yes
Situational Leadership (SIL)	x	x	x	Yes
Promise-based Leadership (PBL)	x	x	-	No
The new deal to the top (NDT)	x	x	-	No
Executive as a coach (EXC)	x	x	-	No
Transactional Leadership (TRL)	x	-	x	No
e-Leadership (ELE)	x	x	x	Yes
Digital Leadership (DGL)	x	x	-	No
The connected Leader (ICL)	x	x	-	No
Complexity Leadership (COL)	x	x	x	Yes
Distributed Leadership (DIL)	x	x	x	Yes

In a next step, the analysis is limited to the relevant leadership styles. It is assumed that the leadership styles most frequently found in the scientific databases are the most relevant in the context of agile leadership. Specifically, the leadership styles Servant Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Shared Leadership, Emergent Leadership and Visionary Leadership are classified as relevant agile leadership styles based on the frequency of the search terms found. The online research shows a significantly lower number of search results for the styles Situational Leadership, e-Leadership, Complexity Leadership and Distributed Leadership. Table 5 gives an overview of the definitions of the selected leadership styles. In the next step, these are examined using a structured criteria catalog to identify possible differences and similarities.

Table 5: Definition Leadership Styles

Servant Leadership (SEL)	The core of SEL is that the leader does not view leadership as a position or status, but as an opportunity to serve others (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 7; Winston, 2003, p. 4; Smith, Montagno, & Kuzmenko, 2004, p. 81).
Transformational Leadership (TFL)	A transformational leader takes targeted actions to provide followers with an integrated understanding of what needs to be achieved. Transformational leaders increase self-confidence and intrinsic motivation in terms of performance (Bass 1985; Wang, Courtright, & Colbert, 2011, p.224)
Emergent Leadership (EML)	Emergent leadership is detached from the organizational hierarchy (Bolden, 2004, p. 12). Thus, individuals at all levels in the organisation and in all roles can exert leadership influence on their colleagues and thus influence the overall direction of the organisation (Bolden, 2004, p. 13).
Shared Leadership (SHL)	Shared leadership does not embody the leader in a single person, but is distributed among the team members (Moe, Dingsøyr, & Kvangardsnes, 2009, p. 1-2). Central to this is interaction between team members and mutual influence and the pursuit of common goals. This should ultimately lead to improved team and company performance (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007, p. 1217ff.).
Visionary Leadership (VIL)	In the course of Visionary Leadership, a picture of the desired organizational state is effectively described and communicated (Bennis & Nanus, 1987; Tichy & Devann, 1986) a picture of a desired organizational state (Bass, 1987, p. 57), which serves to enable the followers to implement the vision (Sashkin, 1987; Srivastva, 1983; Conger & Kanugu, 1987) It has the ability to transform a traditional organization by shaping a desired future and motivating others to take personal responsibility for performance (Nwankwo, & Richardson, 1996, p. 45).

3.2 Analysis based on a catalogue of criteria

In the context of this chapter, the leadership styles are examined using a structured catalogue of criteria.

Leadership Ability - Leadership Ability in the areas of leading skills and dedication is relatively balanced. The leadership styles analyzed are particularly well documented in the area of leading skills. In the majority of cases, this shows the high relevance of interpersonal skills and the competence to build top performance teams. In the Dedication sub-sector, the importance of responsibility and dedication to professional obligations is evident across all styles. On the other hand, a divided view on intrinsic motivation can be observed. Self-promotion is mainly found in the theory of Servant Leadership, whereas this aspect of Leadership Ability is completely missing in Emergent Leadership, Shared Leadership and Transformational Leadership. In principle, there is hardly any overlap in this area. The design of self-promotion therefore differs greatly in terms of scope and content for each leadership style. In summary, however, it can be said that Leadership Ability can be observed comprehensively in all styles. Above all, Servant Leadership, which with eleven criteria fulfils a high proportion of the total 18 aspects.

Social Skills: Working together is considered relevant in all leadership styles except Visionary Leadership. In this context, the importance of cooperation and building personal relationships is particularly evident. In particular, the leadership style Shared Leadership deals with different areas of cooperation (Working together). The most relevant sub-area in terms of content is value orientation, which is addressed by all five leadership styles. The majority of the styles see the importance of inspiring employees and communicating a shared vision transparently. In summary, it can be said that the styles deal with Social Skills with varying degrees of intensity. However, most styles comprehensively document aspects of social skills in terms of content. Only Visionary Leadership is an exception.

Learning Agility: Learning Agility is addressed in varying degrees of detail and comprehensively. In particular, the leadership styles Shared Leadership, Transformational Leadership and Servant Leadership deal in detail with the agility of learning behavior (Learning Agility). The subarea Willingness to learn shows the high relevance of learning and supporting others in the learning process. But also,

the development of a learning culture is discussed in the theory of Servant Leadership and Transformational Leadership. The subarea Emotional intelligence is considered relevant by the majority of leadership styles. Especially the development of skills to cope with stress and ambiguity is considered important. The Adaptive / Perseverance subarea receives the most attention. All leadership theories deal with this area to varying degrees. The frequent mention of adapting the communication style is striking. There is hardly any overlap in the remaining criteria in this sub-area. In summary, a rather split picture can be observed. On the one hand, Visionary Leadership and Emergent Leadership, which only deal with one or two aspects of the category, and on the other hand Servant Leadership, Transformational Leadership and Shared Leadership, which address criteria for all areas.

Analytical Skills: Analytical Skills is dealt with in varying degrees of intensity. It is noticeable that the distribution is rather contrary to the other categories. Specifically, Servant Leadership covers very few aspects of content, whereas Visionary Leadership goes into great detail on the criteria listed. A look at the Strategic Insight section reveals a split picture. Both Visionary Leadership and Shared Leadership cover a large proportion of the aspects, while the other styles cover little or no criteria. In addition, the subarea of decision making is highly relevant in the theories of transformational leadership and visionary leadership. Especially the ability to make decisions and to enable others to make decisions is considered relevant by the majority of the styles. The problem solving part is covered by all styles except Servant Leadership. Here the importance of building problem solving skills is particularly evident. The Foster mutual dependence section shows a similar picture. In the theories of Visionary Leadership, Emergent Leadership and Shared Leadership you will find theories on the corresponding criteria. The advantages of overlapping skills and competencies are considered to be particularly crucial. Results orientation is particularly dealt with in the theories of Visionary Leadership and Shared Leadership.

In summary, the analytical aspect of leadership (Analytical Skills) is represented very differently in the theories. The theories on Visionary Leadership and Shared Leadership in particular deal intensively with this aspect. Transformational Leadership, Emergent Leadership and Servant Leadership, on the other hand, deal with the contents to a significantly smaller extent.

4 Conclusion, Limitation and Further Research

What has already been hinted at in theory is also evident in the study. The theory shows that original forms of management, especially in the context of traditional hierarchical corporate structures, were primarily process-oriented. In contrast, today's more modern management styles focus primarily on people. The personality traits of the leader are particularly important. This is also shown by the analysis carried out. Agile Leadership is a broadly based term, which includes a multitude of factors, which are particularly in the area of character traits. This can be derived from the scope and content of the consolidated catalogue of criteria, which is very comprehensive with four categories, sixteen subcategories and 71 parameters. Nevertheless, it is possible to define the main focus of this subject area in terms of content. The four criteria Leadership Ability, Social Skills, Learning Agility and Analytical Skills, which are more personal factors, indicate the main focus of the leadership theories analysed.

A similar picture in connection with the observed scope can be seen in the selection of the styles to be examined. Databases show a large number of terms in the context of agile leadership, with only a limited number of five theories showing a corresponding relevance due to the frequency of the search results. In terms of content, however, no clear conclusion can be drawn

Within the broad spectrum of the term agile leadership, the five styles examined position themselves very differently (in terms of content and scope). It can be stated, however, that the styles are neither completely congruent nor completely independent of each other. In summary, the study shows transparently that although there is some overlap between different agile leadership styles, the theories differ significantly from each other when viewed holistically.

The catalogue of criteria used is based on a limited number of scientific papers on the topic of agile leadership, whereas there is a large number of publications on the topic. Nevertheless, the chosen number and selection of publications is considered meaningful, as the project team believes that they provide broad support for the term agile leadership. It should also be mentioned that only a limited number of leadership styles were examined. Furthermore, no conclusive objectivity can be guaranteed both for the selection of the individual criteria and for the clarification

of the agreement in papers. For both the selection process and the analysis process, a certain degree of subjectivity cannot be avoided within the scope of this work.

The analysis carried out and the knowledge gained will serve as a basis for further research in the field of agile leadership. In the literature, there is a need for further research to define the concept of agile leadership. It would also be of great benefit, especially for management practice, to investigate in which corporate context and under which conditions, which of the identified agile leadership styles should be used. Further interesting insights would also be provided by researching the dependencies of the leadership theories analyzed on factors such as culture, geographical origin, authors and temporal development.

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