Leading Through Complexity: An Integrative Framework for Managing Change, Resolving Conflict and Developing Leaders in Multinational Organisations

Taiwo Toluwase Agbakosi

School of Business, Computing and Social Sciences, University of Gloucestershire.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100900889

Received: 05 October 2026; Accepted: 10 October 2026; Published: 26 October 2026

ABSTRACT

Contemporary organisations operate in environments characterised by globalisation, technological change, uncertainty and increasingly diverse workforces. Leadership research provides substantial explanations for these conditions, but important strands of the literature are often examined separately. This article argues that organisational change, conflict management and leadership development can be examined through three interconnected leadership capabilities: adaptive capability, relational capability and ethical consistency. The article synthesises relevant leadership, organisational behaviour and cross-cultural management literature, applies the synthesis to conflict in multinational teams, considers how organisations develop leadership capability, and proposes an Adaptive-Relational-Ethical (ARE) framework. The framework is presented as a conceptual and literature-based contribution rather than an empirically validated theory. Its central proposition is that leaders facing complex organisational conditions may need to adapt their responses, maintain constructive relationships and make ethically defensible decisions simultaneously. The article concludes by identifying practical implications, limitations and priorities for future empirical research.

Keywords—adaptive leadership, conflict management, cross-cultural management, ethical leadership, leadership development, multinational organisations, organisational complexity, relational leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership research has produced a rich but fragmented picture of how organisations should respond to changing and complex environments [1]. One body of work examines leadership styles and their relationship with organisational performance and change [2], [3]. A second examines interpersonal and cross-cultural conflict, particularly in multinational settings [4], [5]. A third focuses on leadership development and the creation of future leadership capability [6]. These streams are valuable, but they are often treated as separate practical and theoretical problems.

This article takes a different approach. Rather than treating leadership style, conflict management and leadership development as unrelated topics, it argues that they can be connected through a broader leadership capacity involving adaptability, relationships and ethical judgement. The argument is not that these concepts are new. Each has substantial foundations in established scholarship. The proposed contribution lies in integrating them into a single analytical framework for complex organisational situations.

The article is particularly concerned with situations in which several demands occur simultaneously. A multinational organisation undergoing change, for example, may require leaders to adjust plans, manage employee concerns, resolve disagreements and make decisions perceived as fair across cultural and organisational boundaries. Such situations make it difficult to understand leadership effectiveness through a single leadership style or isolated competency.

The article therefore develops the Adaptive-Relational-Ethical (ARE) framework. Adaptive capability concerns the ability to respond appropriately to changing circumstances and learn when established approaches are insufficient. Relational capability concerns communication, trust, perspective-taking and constructive management of relationships. Ethical consistency concerns the application of defensible

principles such as fairness, respect and accountability while still allowing behaviour to be adapted to context.

The framework is presented as a conceptual proposition rather than an established causal model. The article asks whether the interaction between these capabilities provides a useful way of organising existing knowledge and identifying questions for future research.

Approach and Scope

The article uses a narrative literature synthesis rather than a systematic review. The literature was selected for its relevance to leadership, organisational change, conflict, leadership development, complexity and cross-cultural management. Foundational sources are retained where they remain central to the concepts being discussed, while more recent scholarship is used where it strengthens or updates the argument.

The sources cited were published between 1983 and 2024 and were selected to cover each theme in the article: transactional, transformational, adaptive, relational, complexity, ethical and responsible leadership, conflict, trust, cultural intelligence and leadership development. Because the databases and search terms were not recorded when the literature was assembled, the selection should be read as purposive rather than exhaustive.

This approach does not provide the reproducible search protocol, explicit inclusion criteria or formal quality assessment of a systematic review, and the literature base contains a substantial proportion of Western and Anglophone scholarship. The ARE framework is consequently presented as an organising lens requiring empirical testing.

Leadership Approaches to Organisational Challenges: A Critical Synthesis

The established debate between transactional and transformational leadership provides a useful starting point. Transactional leadership emphasises structure, role clarity, monitoring and performance-related exchange, while transformational leadership emphasises vision, motivation and the mobilisation of followers around broader objectives [2], [3]. The distinction is useful, but treating the two approaches as mutually exclusive can oversimplify organisational reality. Leaders may require structural clarity and accountability while also encouraging learning, commitment and adaptation, a point reinforced by broader reviews of the leadership field, which note that the accumulation of discrete leadership styles has outpaced efforts to explain how leaders combine them in practice [1].

Research has also moved beyond leader-centred explanations. Relational leadership views leadership as a process emerging through social interaction rather than simply as a set of characteristics possessed by a formal leader [7]. Complexity leadership similarly conceptualises leadership as a dynamic process embedded within complex systems [8]. These perspectives are particularly relevant where problems cannot be solved through unilateral managerial authority.

Adaptive leadership adds another important distinction. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky [9] distinguish challenges that can be addressed through existing expertise from adaptive challenges that require learning, changed assumptions and altered patterns of behaviour. Recent scholarship continues to identify adaptive leadership as a valuable but conceptually fragmented field. Rahman, Beamish, and Althaus [10], for example, reviewed 278 scholarly works and identified conceptual ambiguity, limited theoretical integration and methodological weaknesses in the existing field. Their proposed processual framework emphasises diagnosing systems, identifying adaptive challenges, collective activation, regulating distress and generative friction.

Ethical leadership provides a different but complementary perspective. Brown and Treviño [11], building on Brown, Treviño, and Harrison's [12] social learning account, describe ethical leadership in terms of appropriate conduct and the leader's role in influencing ethical behaviour. Ethical consistency is particularly relevant during organisational change and conflict because employees may evaluate not only the outcome of a decision but also whether the process was fair and transparent. Organisational justice research similarly demonstrates the importance of fairness perceptions in organisational attitudes and behaviour [13].

Responsible leadership extends this concern by emphasising relationships with multiple stakeholders rather than focusing solely on shareholder or short-term organisational interests [14]. This is important for multinational organisations, where leaders may need to consider employees, customers, communities,

regulators and other stakeholders across different institutional contexts.

Cross-cultural leadership adds further complexity. Cultural intelligence concerns the capability to function effectively in culturally diverse situations [15], and comparative work on national cultural values [5] and leadership expectations [16] shows that assumptions about appropriate leader behaviour vary systematically across societies. However, leaders should avoid treating culture as a deterministic explanation for every disagreement. Differences may also arise from personality, professional identity, organisational structure, incentives and previous experiences. Cultural awareness should therefore support contextual understanding rather than stereotyping.

Crisis and uncertainty provide a useful setting in which these approaches intersect. Adaptive performance research demonstrates that employees and organisations need to respond effectively to changing demands [17], [18]. Recent meta-analytic research has also examined the relationship between leadership and adaptive performance, reinforcing the relevance of leadership to adaptation while recognising contextual variation [19].

Table I Leadership Approaches and Organisational Challenges

Leadership perspective	Primary contribution	Relevant organisational challenge
Transactional	Structure, accountability and performance expectations	Operational stability
Transformational	Vision, motivation and mobilisation	Change and uncertainty
Ethical / responsible	Fairness, accountability and stakeholder responsibility	Trust and legitimacy
Relational	Relationships, communication and social processes	Conflict and collaboration
Complexity	Emergence, interaction and system-level adaptation	Uncertainty and innovation
Adaptive	Learning, adjustment and response to non-routine challenges	Change and complexity

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that the question is not simply which leadership style is best. A more useful question is how leaders select, combine and adapt appropriate responses while maintaining relationships and ethical boundaries. This provides the conceptual foundation for the ARE framework.

ARE and Existing Integrative Perspectives

Several established perspectives already combine elements of adaptation, relationships and ethics. The relevant question is therefore not whether these elements appear in the literature, but whether existing perspectives explain how they work together under complex conditions. Table II compares ARE with the five perspectives most closely related to it.

Table II ARE Compared with Related Leadership Perspectives

Perspective	Overlap with ARE	What it leaves open
Transformational [2], [3]	Relational and ethical elements, such as individualised consideration and idealised influence	Learning and adjustment in non-routine situations are not central

Authentic [30]	Self-awareness, relational transparency and an internalised moral perspective	Centres on consistency with the leader's self rather than responsiveness to changing circumstances
Responsible [14]	Stakeholder relationships and ethical responsibility	Limited attention to learning and non-routine adaptation
Complexity [8]	Adaptation, interaction and emergence	System-level focus; individual ethical boundaries are not specified
Shared [28]	Distributed, relational influence	Ethical and adaptive requirements are not explicitly integrated

Two patterns emerge. First, each perspective treats one or two of the three capabilities as central and leaves the remainder assumed or secondary. Transformational leadership, for example, incorporates relational and ethical elements [2], [3] but gives learning in non-routine situations less prominence than adaptive leadership does [9], while authentic leadership emphasises ethical self-regulation and relational transparency [30] without focusing on how leaders adjust to changing circumstances. Second, the perspectives reviewed here do not systematically specify how the capabilities condition one another. This is the gap that ARE addresses. Its proposed contribution is an account of three interdependencies.

Information. Relational capability supplies the information that adaptation requires. Leaders who lack trust and open dialogue may not learn that established approaches are failing, because employees' willingness to raise concerns depends partly on trust and psychological safety [21], [22].

Boundaries. Ethical consistency defines the boundaries within which adaptive decisions remain legitimate. It distinguishes a flexible response grounded in defensible principles from an opportunistic one, a distinction that matters because employees evaluate the fairness of decision processes as well as their outcomes [11], [13].

Recalibration. Adaptation, in turn, changes how relationships must be maintained. As circumstances shift, communication, expectations and responsibilities must be renegotiated, so relational effort cannot be treated as fixed [9], [10].

These interdependencies are conceptual propositions rather than established findings, and they are examined further in the section presenting the ARE framework.

Selection of the three capabilities. The three capabilities are selected because each addresses a distinct feature of organisational complexity: changing conditions (adaptive capability), interdependence among people (relational capability) and the legitimacy of decisions made under competing demands (ethical consistency). Other capabilities discussed in the literature, including emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence and systems thinking, are treated here as enabling resources that support these three rather than as separate dimensions. This is an analytical choice rather than an established finding, and future research should test it.

Leadership, Conflict and Multinational Teams

Conflict is a normal feature of organisational life. Differences in goals, resources, responsibilities, values and interpretations can generate disagreement between individuals and groups. Conflict is therefore not necessarily evidence of ineffective leadership. Under appropriate conditions, disagreement can expose problems and encourage alternative perspectives. The leadership challenge concerns how conflict is interpreted and managed and whether it becomes constructive or destructive.

Leaders influence conflict through how they frame disagreement, communicate with those involved and determine appropriate responses. A leader who dismisses disagreement may prevent concerns from being expressed openly, while a leader who allows disagreement to escalate without intervention may damage

relationships and team effectiveness. Relational capability is therefore central to effective conflict management.

The empirical literature also suggests that not all forms of conflict have the same consequences. Jehn [20] distinguishes task conflict, disagreement over the content of work, from relationship conflict, interpersonal friction unrelated to the task, and finds that the two are experienced and managed differently. De Dreu and Weingart [4], in a meta-analysis, found that both relationship conflict and task conflict were generally associated with lower team performance and satisfaction, although the relationship between conflict and outcomes is complex. This supports a cautious approach to claims that conflict is inherently beneficial.

In multinational teams, conflict may be complicated by differences in language, communication preferences, professional backgrounds and expectations concerning hierarchy and disagreement, of the kind documented in cross-national comparisons of cultural values and leadership expectations [5], [16]. Cultural intelligence can help leaders recognise these differences, although, as noted above, not every disagreement should be attributed to national culture.

Ethical consistency becomes particularly important when leaders manage disputes involving people with whom they have established relationships. Personal trust or familiarity may unintentionally influence judgement. Organisational justice research suggests that perceptions of fairness matter substantially for employee attitudes and reactions [13]. Ethical consistency therefore requires leaders to explain the principles underlying decisions and to distinguish legitimate differences in treatment from favouritism.

Adaptive capability is also required because conflict situations can change as new information emerges. An informal conversation may be appropriate for a misunderstanding, whereas allegations involving serious misconduct may require a formal process. Effective adaptation does not mean abandoning standards; it means reassessing the situation and selecting a response appropriate to its circumstances.

Trust is another important link between relational and ethical capability. Dirks and Ferrin [21] found substantial relationships between trust in leadership and important employee and organisational outcomes. Edmondson [22] also demonstrated the importance of psychological safety for team learning behaviour. These findings suggest that employees' willingness to raise concerns and engage constructively with disagreement may depend partly on whether they perceive the interpersonal environment as safe and trustworthy.

Developing Leadership Capability

Leadership development involves more than providing information about leadership theories. It includes the development of individual capabilities, relationships and the ability to apply learning in practice. Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, and McKee [6] distinguish leader development from broader leadership development and emphasise the importance of experience, feedback and developmental relationships.

Adaptive capability can be developed through experiences that require leaders to work with unfamiliar problems, lead projects, manage change and make decisions with incomplete information, consistent with longstanding evidence that challenging, varied assignments are among the most powerful drivers of leadership growth [23]. However, experience alone does not guarantee development. Reflection is required to examine assumptions, consequences and alternative responses, drawing on the established distinction between experience and learning from experience [24] and on the role of reflection-in-action in developing professional judgement [25].

Relational capability can be strengthened through coaching, mentoring, feedback, collaborative projects, conflict-management exercises and cross-functional work. Feedback is particularly useful because leaders may have inaccurate perceptions of how their behaviour is experienced by others. Leader-member exchange research also demonstrates the importance of leader-follower relationships in organisational life [26].

Ethical capability requires opportunities to reason through competing interests and difficult decisions. Case discussions and simulations can ask leaders to consider who is affected, whether a decision is fair, whether similar situations are treated consistently and whether the decision can be explained openly. Ethical leadership

scholarship provides the theoretical foundation for this approach [11], [12].

The three capabilities should also be practised together. A restructuring exercise, for example, can require participants to respond to uncertain information, communicate with affected employees, manage disagreement and justify decisions ethically. This provides a more realistic test of leadership capability than teaching each competency in complete isolation.

Cross-cultural leadership development is particularly relevant to multinational organisations. Cultural intelligence research indicates that the ability to understand and function across cultural contexts can be relevant to performance and leadership processes [15], [27]. However, cross-cultural development should avoid simplistic national stereotypes and should encourage curiosity, perspective-taking and contextual judgement.

ARE therefore suggests a developmental cycle: experience, reflection, learning, application, feedback, and further adaptation. Leadership development should be viewed as ongoing rather than as a one-time training intervention.

The Adaptive-Relational-Ethical (ARE) Framework

The preceding discussion provides the basis for the ARE framework. ARE brings together adaptive capability, relational capability and ethical consistency as three analytically distinct but potentially interdependent dimensions of leadership in complex organisational situations. The framework does not claim that these constructs are new; rather, it proposes that their interaction deserves explicit examination.

Adaptive Capability

Adaptive capability refers to a leader's ability to recognise changing circumstances, question assumptions, learn from experience and modify actions when established responses are no longer appropriate. It includes reassessing information, tolerating uncertainty, experimenting where appropriate and distinguishing technical problems from challenges that require learning. Pulakos et al. [17] provide a foundational taxonomy of adaptive performance, while Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky [9] provide a leadership perspective focused on adaptive challenges.

More recent scholarship strengthens the case for treating adaptive leadership as a process rather than merely an individual trait. Rahman, Beamish, and Althaus [10] argue that adaptive leadership is relational, recursive and temporal, with adaptive processes emerging through interactions between people and organisational conditions.

Relational Capability

Relational capability refers to the ability to build and maintain constructive relationships through communication, listening, perspective-taking, trust, negotiation and conflict management. Uhl-Bien [7] conceptualises leadership as a relational process, while later work in complexity and shared leadership further emphasises interaction and collective processes [8], [28].

Relational capability is particularly important because leadership does not occur independently of followers and other stakeholders. Leadership effectiveness can be influenced by the quality of social relationships through which decisions are interpreted and implemented.

Ethical Consistency

Ethical consistency refers to maintaining defensible principles concerning fairness, respect, accountability and responsible decision-making while adapting leadership behaviour to different circumstances. Consistency does not mean identical treatment in every situation. A leader may reasonably adapt communication or implementation practices while maintaining clear ethical expectations.

Brown and Treviño [11] provide a central foundation for ethical leadership, while responsible-leadership

scholarship extends the discussion to multiple stakeholders [14]. Importantly, more recent scholarship has questioned overly individualistic and decontextualised conceptions of ethical leadership. Liu [29] argues that dominant conceptions of ethical leadership often treat it as an individual trait exercised independently of organisational power structures, and proposes instead that ethical leadership be understood as a relational, contextual and political practice, one that is shaped by, and enacted through, the relationships and power dynamics within which a leader is embedded.

This critique reinforces two points already implicit in the discussion above. First, ethical consistency should not be reduced to a fixed checklist of individual traits, since what counts as fair or accountable can only be judged in relation to a specific organisational and cultural context. Second, the ethical dimension is not fully separable from the relational dimension, since ethical judgement is exercised through relationships with employees, stakeholders and other leaders, rather than formed in isolation and then simply applied to them.

Interaction Among the Three Dimensions

The three dimensions are presented separately for analytical clarity, but the preceding sections suggest they are interdependent rather than independent. Adaptive responses to change that are not grounded in relational trust are liable to be resisted, since employees' willingness to engage constructively with change depends partly on psychological safety and trust in leadership [21], [22]. Relational effort, in turn, is undermined where it is not perceived as fair, since perceptions of favouritism or inconsistency are themselves a documented source of conflict [13]. Ethical consistency, finally, risks becoming rigid if it is not paired with adaptive and relational judgement, particularly in cross-cultural contexts where a single, context-free application of a principle may itself be experienced as unfair [5], [29].

Fig. 1 summarises the framework. Leadership development is positioned as an antecedent process that builds the three capabilities. The capabilities are linked by the three interdependencies described above. Together they are expressed in integrated leadership practice, illustrated here by change management and conflict management.

The framework treats the capabilities as individual leader competencies that are enacted through leader behaviour and in relationships with followers and teams, which is why outcomes are grouped by level: trust and fairness as follower perceptions, conflict resolution as a process outcome, and team effectiveness and effective adaptation as collective outcomes. Contextual conditions are shown as influencing the strength of these relationships.

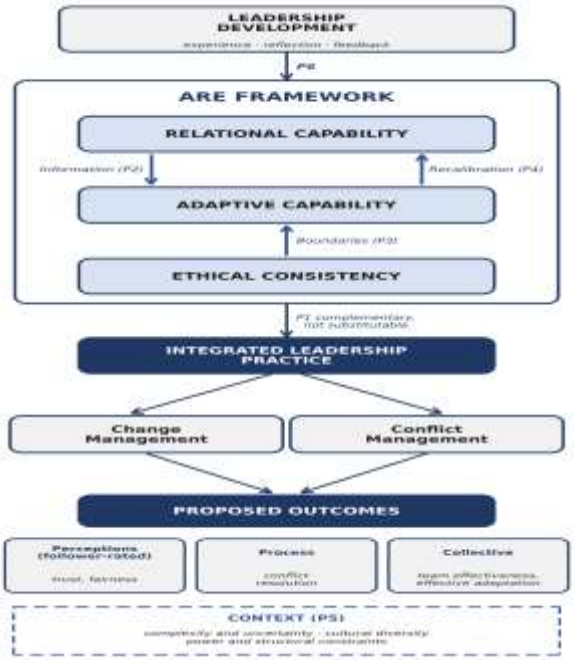


Fig. 1 The ARE framework: capability development, interdependencies (P1-P6), leadership practice, outcomes and contextual conditions

Research Propositions

The interdependencies described above can be expressed as propositions to guide empirical testing. They are theoretical expectations derived from the literature reviewed, not established findings.

Proposition 1 (complementarity). Leadership effectiveness in complex change and conflict situations will be highest when adaptive capability, relational capability and ethical consistency are all high. A marked deficit in any one capability will limit the benefit of strength in the others, so the capabilities are complementary rather than substitutable.

Proposition 2 (information). Relational capability strengthens the relationship between adaptive capability and change-management effectiveness, because it gives leaders access to the information needed to judge whether adaptation is working and builds the trust on which implementation depends [21], [22].

Proposition 3 (boundaries). Ethical consistency moderates the relationship between adaptive decisions and employee trust. Adaptive decisions will increase trust when employees perceive them as consistent with defensible principles and a fair process, and will reduce trust when they are perceived as opportunistic [11], [13].

Proposition 4 (recalibration). Adaptive changes accompanied by relational recalibration, such as explaining reasons and renegotiating expectations, will be associated with more constructive conflict-management outcomes and lower relationship conflict than adaptive changes made without such recalibration [4], [20].

Proposition 5 (context). The relationships in Propositions 1 to 4 will be stronger where organisational complexity and uncertainty are high, and weaker where leaders' decision authority, policies, incentives or employee voice mechanisms constrain their ability to act [29]. In multinational settings, cultural and institutional distance is expected to increase the importance of relational capability and to shape what is perceived as ethically consistent [5], [15].

Proposition 6 (development). Leadership development that builds the three capabilities jointly, through applied cross-cultural change and conflict scenarios, will produce greater gains in integrated leadership capability than programmes that address each capability in separate modules.

Because trust and fairness are follower perceptions, testing these propositions will require follower-rated measures alongside leader self-assessments, since the two may differ.

Illustrative Application: A Multinational Restructuring

To show how the framework operates in practice, consider a hypothetical multinational organisation that consolidates its regional operations into a single global function, changing reporting lines and eliminating some roles. The example is illustrative rather than empirical, and it follows three stages.

Diagnosis and decision. Adaptive capability appears when the leader recognises that the regional model no longer fits, questions assumptions about what the change requires, and distinguishes technical problems from challenges that require learning [9]. Relational capability appears when the leader consults regional managers before deciding, since their local knowledge shows which parts of the plan are unworkable (Proposition 2). Ethical consistency appears when the leader sets out in advance the criteria for decisions about roles, so that choices can be defended as fair and applied consistently (Proposition 3).

Implementation. The leader adjusts the plan as early results and objections emerge. Relational recalibration is needed at this point: the reasons for each adjustment are explained and expectations are renegotiated with affected teams, particularly where communication norms and expectations of authority differ across countries [5], [16] (Proposition 4). Ethical consistency requires the same principles to be applied in every location, even though the way they are communicated may be adapted, so that differences in treatment can be explained by circumstances rather than favouritism [13].

Conflict and consolidation. Disagreement arises between regional teams over workload and role allocation.

Adaptive capability allows the leader to ask whether the disagreement signals a genuine design problem [20]. Relational capability separates task disagreement from personal friction and keeps dialogue open [4]. Ethical consistency means explaining the principles behind contested decisions and accepting scrutiny of them. The outcomes proposed in Fig. 1 follow: trust and perceived fairness among employees, resolution of the disagreement, and effective team functioning under the new structure.

The example also shows what the framework predicts when a capability is weak (Proposition 1). Adaptation without relational input risks a plan that fails in implementation. Relational effort without ethical consistency invites perceptions of favouritism. Ethical rigidity without adaptation applies principles that no longer fit the situation. Finally, if decision authority rests with headquarters, a regional leader with strong capabilities may still be unable to act on them (Proposition 5).

DISCUSSION: IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

For theory, the framework shifts attention from whether adaptive, relational and ethical leadership each matter, which is well established, to how they condition one another and under what circumstances. The propositions identify conditions under which the combination should matter more or less, including organisational context and structural constraints. They also point to tensions that existing perspectives treat only in passing, notably between ethical consistency and adaptation, and between maintaining relationships and making unpopular but necessary decisions. Examining these tensions empirically is where the framework is most likely to add to existing leadership theory.

For practice, the clearest implication is that leadership development should be built around integrated, applied scenarios, particularly cross-cultural conflict and change situations, rather than separate topic modules (Proposition 6). It also implies closer coordination between conflict management and leadership development, which organisations often house in different functions.

A further implication concerns how leadership is evaluated. If the three dimensions are genuinely interdependent, performance or promotion criteria that assess leaders primarily on outcomes, an implicit proxy for adaptive capability alone, risk overlooking relational and ethical weaknesses that may undermine those same outcomes under future pressure. A review process that also asks how a leader built trust and maintained fairness while adapting to a specific challenge, rather than only whether the challenge was resolved, would better reflect the framework proposed here.

Liu's [29] critique also has a direct organisational implication: ethical consistency cannot be developed or assessed purely as an individual trait, decoupled from the power structures and relationships within which a leader operates. This suggests that ethics-focused leadership development should attend explicitly to organisational context and power dynamics, rather than treating ethical judgement as a portable, context-free skill.

The limitations of this article should be stated plainly. First, it is a conceptual synthesis rather than an empirical study, and the ARE framework has not been tested against primary data. Second, the literature drawn on is weighted toward Western and Anglophone management scholarship, so the framework's applicability to other leadership traditions remains an open question. Third, the narrative search was not conducted through a reproducible protocol; a systematic review, of the kind Rahman, Beamish, and Althaus [10] apply to adaptive leadership, would be a natural next step. Ways of addressing these limitations are set out in the research agenda below.

Future Research Agenda

The propositions can be evaluated through complementary research designs, each suited to different parts of the framework.

Qualitative case studies. Case studies of multinational organisations undergoing restructuring or integration could trace how leaders' adaptive, relational and ethical behaviour unfolds over time and how followers interpret it. They are well suited to examining the mechanisms in Propositions 2 to 4 and the contextual

conditions in Proposition 5, including cultural and institutional differences.

Longitudinal studies. Repeated measurement during organisational change could test the proposed sequence, for example whether trust changes after adaptive decisions and whether that change depends on ethical consistency (Proposition 3) or relational recalibration (Proposition 4).

Multi-source quantitative studies. Leaders' capabilities should be rated by followers and peers as well as by leaders themselves, because employees' perceptions of fairness and trust may differ from leaders' self-assessments. Interaction effects among the capabilities (Propositions 1 to 3) can be tested in multi-level designs that include team-level outcomes and measured contextual variables such as cultural intelligence, institutional distance and decision authority (Proposition 5).

Evaluation of development programmes. Quasi-experimental studies could compare integrated, scenario-based development with modular training, using pre-programme, post-programme and follow-up measures (Proposition 6).

Measurement. Existing validated measures should be used before new instruments are proposed. Candidates include measures of adaptive performance [17], ethical leadership [12], organisational justice [13], trust in leadership [21], psychological safety [22], intragroup conflict [20], leader–member exchange quality [26] and cultural intelligence [15]. New measurement work is most likely to be needed for relational capability and ethical consistency as defined here, and should establish that the three capabilities are empirically distinguishable from one another and from their antecedents and outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that leadership style, conflict management and leadership development, though usually examined separately, can be examined through three interconnected capabilities: adaptive capability, relational capability and ethical consistency. The resulting Adaptive-Relational-Ethical (ARE) framework offers a modest integrative contribution. It specifies three proposed interdependencies, expresses them as six research propositions, and positions leadership development as the process that builds the capabilities rather than as one of their applications. Empirical testing, using follower-rated outcomes and samples beyond the largely Western literature base drawn on here, is the natural next step.

REFERENCES

1. B. J. Avolio, F. O. Walumbwa, and T. J. Weber, "Leadership: Current theories, research, and future directions," Annu. Rev. Psychol., vol. 60, pp. 421-449, 2009.
2. B. M. Bass, Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations. New York: Free Press, 1985.
3. B. M. Bass and R. E. Riggio, Transformational Leadership, 2nd ed. Mahwah, NJ: Psychology Press, 2006.
4. C. K. W. De Dreu and L. R. Weingart, "Task versus relationship conflict, team performance, and team member satisfaction: A meta-analysis," J. Appl. Psychol., vol. 88, no. 4, pp. 741-749, 2003.
5. G. Hofstede, Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001.
6. D. V. Day, J. W. Fleenor, L. E. Atwater, R. E. Sturm, and R. A. McKee, "Advances in leader and leadership development: A review of 25 years of research and theory," Leadersh. Q., vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 63-82, 2014.
7. M. Uhl-Bien, "Relational leadership theory: Exploring the social processes of leadership and organizing," Leadersh. Q., vol. 17, no. 6, pp. 654-676, 2006.
8. M. Uhl-Bien, R. Marion, and B. McKelvey, "Complexity leadership theory: Shifting leadership from the industrial age to the knowledge era," Leadersh. Q., vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 298-318, 2007.
9. R. Heifetz, A. Grashow, and M. Linsky, The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009.
10. S. Rahman, A. Beamish, and C. Althaus, "From fragmentation to integration: Reframing adaptive leadership through an integrative review," Manag. Rev. Q., 2026, doi: 10.1007/s11301-026-00593-1.

11. M. E. Brown and L. K. Treviño, "Ethical leadership: A review and future directions," Leadersh. Q., vol. 17, no. 6, pp. 595-616, 2006.
12. M. E. Brown, L. K. Treviño, and D. A. Harrison, "Ethical leadership: A social learning perspective for construct development and testing," Organ. Behav. Hum. Decis. Process., vol. 97, no. 2, pp. 117-134, 2005.
13. J. A. Colquitt, D. E. Conlon, M. J. Wesson, C. O. L. H. Porter, and K. Y. Ng, "Justice at the millennium: A meta-analytic review of 25 years of organizational justice research," J. Appl. Psychol., vol. 86, no. 3, pp. 425-445, 2001.
14. T. Maak and N. M. Pless, "Responsible leadership in a stakeholder society: A relational perspective," J. Bus. Ethics, vol. 66, no. 1, pp. 99-115, 2006.
15. S. Ang and L. Van Dyne, Eds., Handbook of Cultural Intelligence: Theory, Measurement, and Applications. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2008.
16. R. J. House, P. J. Hanges, M. Javidan, P. W. Dorfman, and V. Gupta, Eds., Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004.
17. E. D. Pulakos, S. Arad, M. A. Donovan, and K. E. Plamondon, "Adaptability in the workplace: Development of a taxonomy of adaptive performance," J. Appl. Psychol., vol. 85, no. 4, pp. 612-624, 2000.
18. E. D. Pulakos, N. Schmitt, D. W. Dorsey, S. Arad, J. W. Hedge, and W. C. Borman, "Predicting adaptive performance: Further tests of a model of adaptability," Hum. Perform., vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 299-323, 2002.
19. Bonini, C. Panari, L. Caricati, and M. G. Mariani, "The relationship between leadership and adaptive performance: A systematic review and meta-analysis," PLOS ONE, vol. 19, no. 10, e0304720, 2024.
20. K. A. Jehn, "A multimethod examination of the benefits and detriments of intragroup conflict," Adm. Sci. Q., vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 256-282, 1995.
21. K. T. Dirks and D. L. Ferrin, "Trust in leadership: Meta-analytic findings and implications for research and practice," J. Appl. Psychol., vol. 87, no. 4, pp. 611-628, 2002.
22. Edmondson, "Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams," Adm. Sci. Q., vol. 44, no. 2, pp. 350-383, 1999.
23. M. W. McCall, High Flyers: Developing the Next Generation of Leaders. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1998.
24. D. A. Kolb, Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984.
25. D. A. Schön, The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action. New York: Basic Books, 1983.
26. J. H. Dulebohn, W. H. Bommer, R. C. Liden, R. L. Brouer, and G. R. Ferris, "A meta-analysis of antecedents and consequences of leader-member exchange: Integrating the past with an eye toward the future," J. Manag., vol. 38, no. 6, pp. 1715-1759, 2012.
27. T. Rockstuhl, S. Seiler, S. Ang, L. Van Dyne, and H. Annen, "Beyond general intelligence (IQ) and emotional intelligence (EQ): The role of cultural intelligence (CQ) on cross-border leadership effectiveness in a globalized world," J. Soc. Issues, vol. 67, no. 4, pp. 825-840, 2012.
28. D. Wang, D. A. Waldman, and Z. Zhang, "A meta-analysis of shared leadership and team effectiveness," J. Appl. Psychol., vol. 99, no. 2, pp. 181-198, 2014.
29. H. Liu, "Reimagining ethical leadership as a relational, contextual and political practice," Leadership, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 343-367, 2017.
30. F. O. Walumbwa, B. J. Avolio, W. L. Gardner, T. S. Wernsing, and S. J. Peterson, "Authentic leadership: Development and validation of a theory-based measure," J. Manag., vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 89-126, 2008.
31.