

# “Leadership Today: Politics, Business and Education in the Web of Science”

Mireia Tintoré<sup>1</sup>, and Casilda Güell<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Barcelona (Spain)

**Abstract:** *The purpose of this paper is to do an analysis of the evolution of the studies on leadership since 1950s in the areas of politics, business and education in order to create synergies among them and improve leadership research and training using a multidisciplinary lens. Our study shows the main leadership tendencies at present in politics, business and education analyzing the hundred most cited articles in the three areas taking into account the different features. The paper does a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the concepts more often related to leadership in these articles in order to find the main trends and related concepts. We conclude that leadership studies have widely extended creating very different branches of the original tree, most of them not related between one another. However, there are some common interests and some elements of contact that we should explore in order to create synergies. We point out that theoretical and empirical studies on educational leadership have expanded and are contributing to the development of leadership in other areas. The main implications of our study are that its results may be useful as a guide for the formation of leaders and as a guide for finding potential synergies amongst the areas analyzed.*

**Keywords:** *leadership, political leadership, business leadership, educational leadership, Web of Science.*

## 1. Introduction

Research on the subject of leadership is becoming increasingly more prominent on the Net and in libraries. And not only academics, but also teachers of management courses concerned with the management of any kind of institution are devoting more and more time to the subject. The vast amount of literature on leadership is clear evidence of the importance of the subject and shows, in turn, how difficult it is to focus on its true essence, about which all western and oriental cultures have spoken and written since earliest antiquity.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the evolution of leadership research from the moment the boom of articles on the topic of leadership started, mid-twentieth century. We will focus on articles and on three areas (politics, business and education), which together account for the 45 per cent of the published articles in the Web of Science. First, we do a quantitative analysis of the output in politics, business and education. Second, we proceed to study which concepts relate to leadership in each area from a qualitative perspective hoping to extract trends and target opportunities in order to improve training on this topic.

## 2. Methodology

We will perform a literature study based on the bibliographic database of the Web of Science. This type of investigation, which is increasingly used, is the result of the growing amount of information and channels of distribution. It enables us to access a vast amount of data in a short period of time, which can then be processed and compared.

In this case, we will analyze scientifically relevant primary sources – academic journal articles indexed in major databases- to develop our core research ideas, which we will then turn into knowledge by drawing conclusions. In order to do this we intend to describe the contents of the main points in an objective, systematic and qualitative way, primarily through analyzing the titles.

The search criterion is a key word, “leadership”, and from there academic articles on this subject and/or with this title in the *Web of Science* are analyzed (more specifically, the *Social Science Citation Index* and the *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*), as they are relevant databases for the object of our research and related to the subject at hand. The data were retrieved on the 20th of January of 2014 and covered the chronological period

between 1956 and 2013. The starting date was determined by the start of publication listing in the SSCI, and the end date was chosen for being the closest completion of a calendar year to the time of research.

First we will report the number of publications throughout the sector of Social and Human Sciences, followed by each of the specific areas (*management & business, education & educational research and political science & public administration*), taking into account articles on the subject of leadership and those that carry the word “leadership” in the title. In order to be more specific we have decided to study this last group of articles in greater depth and to research the chronological evolution that each area has experienced since the middle of the last century.

Then, taking into account the number of articles in each area – 2814 economic, 1156 political and 1318 educational articles – we will analyze the most cited articles in each of the areas. We have decided to take into consideration the number of publications in each area and the percentage they represent to set a ratio to the total number of articles studied. This means we will analyze 22 articles in the field of politics, 25 articles in the field of education and 53 in the field of economics. We will analyze these one hundred articles on the basis of the following criteria: the main areas and years of publication, and the most common concepts related to leadership in the titles of each field. We will then make comparisons and relevant observations and finally draw conclusions on the state of research on the subject of leadership in the three areas of study. This study should facilitate advances in approaches to leadership training and could bring the fields closer together and establish links between them.

### 3. Analysis of Publications on the Subject of Leadership

#### 3.1. Evolution of the number of publications

The study of articles listed on the *Web of Science* (SSCI and A&HCI) on the subject of “leadership” provides interesting data regarding the growth of publications over the period 1956 to 2013. Through this procedure we obtained more than 27.000 articles on the subject of leadership, which decreased to almost 10.000 when applying the criterion that the word “leadership” appeared in the title. This first result already indicates that we are writing about a widely studied subject. After analyzing the results according to the fields covered in our research, the amount is still abundant, especially in the area of business & management, as is reflected in table 1.

TABLE I: Articles on leadership listed on the WoS (SSCI and A&HCI) between 1956 and 2013<sup>1</sup>

Field of search	General Social Sciences	Business- Management	Political Science- Administration	Public	Educational Research
On the <b>subject</b> “Leadership” published 1956- 2013	<b>27.173</b>	<b>6.654</b> (24%)	<b>3.135</b> (11%)	<b>11’5</b>	<b>2.706</b> (10%)
On the <b>subject</b> “Leadership” published 2000- 2013	20.038	5.289	2.055		1.893
With the word “Leadership” in the <b>title</b> published 1956 - 2013	<b>9.781</b>	<b>2.814</b> (28%)	<b>1.156</b> (11%)	<b>11’8</b>	<b>1.318</b> (13%)
With the word “Leadership” in the <b>title</b> published 2000- 2013	5.469	2.004	517		732

<sup>1</sup> Source: Compiled by the authors on the basis of data supplied by the Web of Science (data retrieved 2014-01-20)

The substantial amount of articles is a remarkable phenomenon that must be analyzed in greater depth from the perspective of its chronological segmentation. Processing the data in this way will allow us to point out that the increase in publications on leadership was especially significant around the turn of the millennium, and specifically from 2005 when the number of 150 annual publications overall was exceeded.

The analysis of the amount of publications from the year 2000 provides important data as more than 50% of the publications with the word “leadership” in the title correspond to the period of only 14 years, compared to what was published previously. This is twice as significant in the field of *business & management*, where 71% of the articles were published in or after 2000. In the field of education a little more than half (55% of the articles) was published from 2000 onwards, and in the field of politics this figure is 44%.

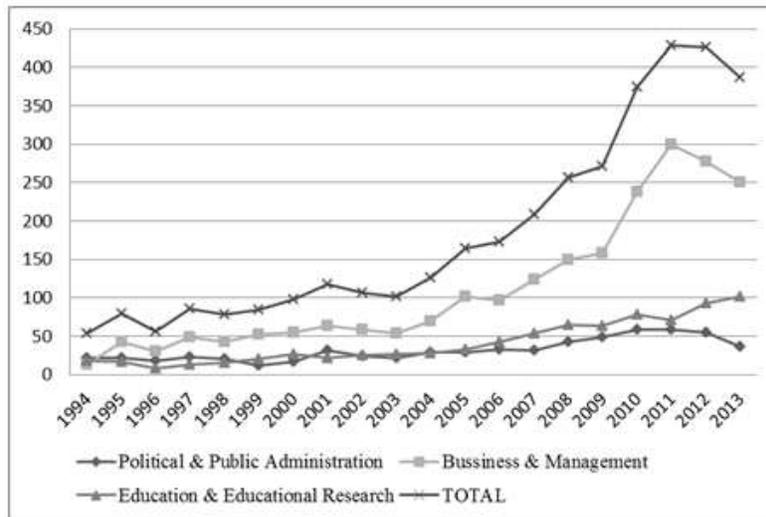


Fig. 1: Evolution of articles with “leadership” in the title 1994- 2014

### 3.2. Main concepts

Apart from the quantitative data, which is quite important, it is relevant to note the type of leadership studies being carried out in recent years, as these are the ones that will set the trend, mark the way forward and reflect the concerns of the academic community.

In the field of politics there seems to be no concern for leadership models (transactional, transformational) as can be found in other fields, except for an article who addresses the issue of charismatic power. Many studies turn towards leadership styles and traits (two articles), administrative leadership and aspects related to the distribution of power, democracy and representation.

Regarding the field of education, we notice the great vitality of this area, as we can clearly observe an orientation towards the empirical verification of leadership models when we focus on the titles. There are 13 articles that show the relationship between educational leadership and student results, by using words such as school improvement, integration, achievement, effects, performance, improvement, outcomes, change and social justice. We also observe a progress towards leadership models developed in recent years, such as distributed leadership (two articles) and leadership for learning (one article). Two of these articles focus on the leadership of the director.

With respect to the economic field, in the first group of articles (articles 1 to 25), apart from an article on the creation of knowledge, the other three articles published after 2000 are still rooted in the transformational leadership of the 90’s and evaluating its impact, but none of the 25 articles has yet taken the step towards distributed leadership. However, in the second group of articles (26 to 53) we continue to observe an overwhelming superiority of articles on transformational leadership and its comparison to the transactional model. However, there is already one article, by Gronn, on distributed leadership and several articles that address the topic of organizational culture and climate, employees and teamwork. These are all aspects that indicate a leap towards less individualistic and more collaborative leadership.

We carried out a detailed analysis of the words that appear in the titles of the one hundred articles under study and found that, apart from the word “leadership”, which was the search criterion for articles, and the word “school”, which appears in 18 out of 25 articles in the field of education, the most common word in the titles is “transformational”. This word, however, does not appear once in the field of politics, it is solely used in the other two fields on 26 occasions, which would rise to 30 if we counted the number of times the concept “charismatic leadership” appears, as this is occasionally used as a synonym. Other concepts that appear repeatedly are related to results (performance, impact, outcomes, achievement), which come up 21 times (in education in 13 out of 25 articles) and in various ways. Behavioral and attitudinal aspects also appear on 11 occasions, but only in the field of economics. It is also worth noting that in the field of politics the word “management” appears in five occasions, which leads us to wonder whether the overemphasis on the technical aspects of governance will prejudice leadership, which is more than pure management.

TABLE II: Concepts that appeared at least twice in the titles of the hundred most cited articles, by field of expertise<sup>2</sup>

	Business- Economics	Political Science	Education- Educational Research	Total	Total including similar
School			18	18	
Organization/ Organizational	5		5	10	28
Transformational (Leadership)	21		5	26	
Charismatic (Leadership)	4			04	30
Transactional (Leadership)	8			08	
Distributed (Leadership)	1		2	03	
Instructional (Leadership)			2	02	13
Effects	5		5	10	
Performance	4		2	06	
Impact			2	02	
Achievement			3	03	21
Public		6		06	
Theory	3		3	06	
Management		5		05	
Student			5	05	
Teacher			4	04	
Principal			3	03	12
Follower	4			04	
Employee	3			03	
Member	2			02	
CEO	2			02	11
Sources			3	03	
Educational			3	03	
Politic		3		03	
International		3		03	
Behavior	3			03	
Attitudes	2			02	
Perceptions	2			02	
Personality	2			02	
Motivation	2			02	11
Reform			2	02	
Democracy		2		02	
Opinion		2		02	
Economy		2		02	
Representation		2		02	

<sup>2</sup> Source: Compiled by the authors on the basis of data supplied by the Web of Science (data retrieved 2014-01-20)

In Table 2 we show a quantitative summary of the main concepts found in the titles of the one hundred articles under study, also taking the field in which they appear into account. This summary will allow us to reinforce the, now recurring, idea that there is a gap between the main subjects studied in the field of politics and the other two fields. It also reveals that there are certain common themes between the fields of education and business, such as the interest in transformational leadership, results and organizational aspects. Furthermore it indicates that the issues of concern, in addition to leadership models, are those related to results, behavior and those involved in the leadership process, from the CEO to employees and students. Here it is also significant that there is only mention of the agents involved in the process in the fields of education and business. In the economic field more importance is given to behavior and motivations, whereas in the educational field there is more of a focus on changes and reforms.

We have grouped the concepts taking into account the most repeated themes (leadership models, the context in which leadership actions occur, agents involved in leadership, leadership results, and psychological, attitudinal and behavioral aspects related to leadership) and the result is shown in Figure 2. The most recurring theme is leadership models, which is mentioned in a quarter of the hundred most cited articles, followed by contextual aspects and those which refer to agents involved in leadership: CEO's, school directors, employees, teachers, students, members and followers in general.

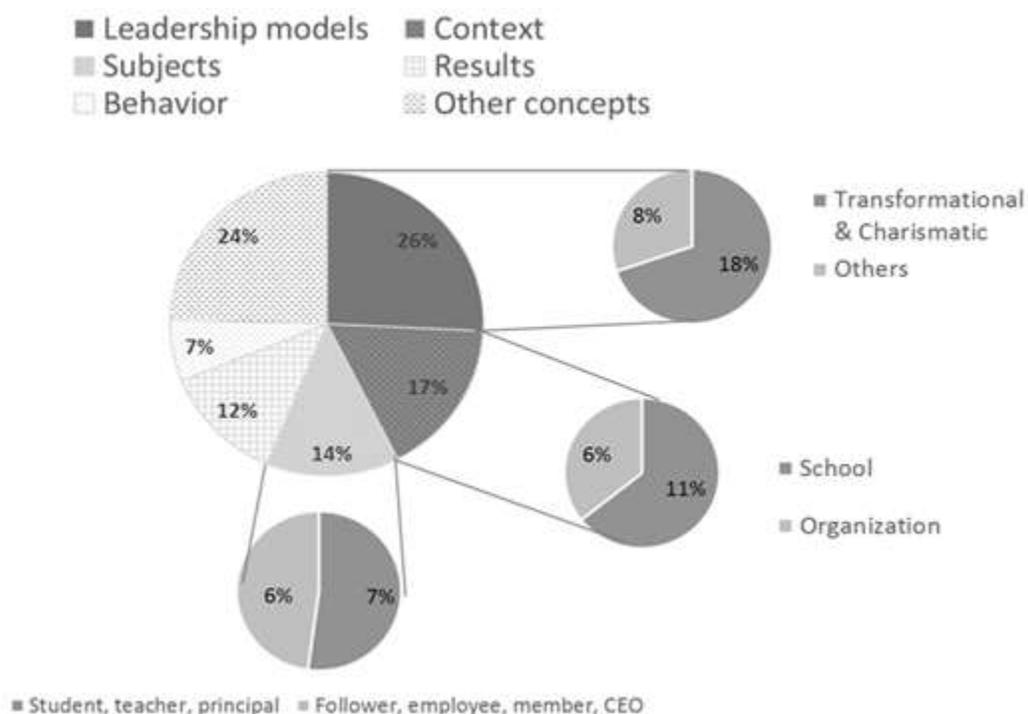


Fig. 2: Most repeated concepts in the 100 most cited articles (Web of Science)

Regarding the most studied theme, leadership models, in the field of economics 73% of the articles that study these models refer to transformational and/or charismatic leadership, 23% refer to transactional leadership, comparing it mainly to the previous model and 2% refers to distributed leadership. However, in education, 55% of the articles on leadership models refer to transformative leadership, 22% to distributed leadership and the remaining 22% to instructive leadership, which confirms the aforementioned progress in this area towards more democratic and collaborative models. In the field of politics there is no notable reference to leadership models.

In 2000 Gronn stated that “transformational leadership dominates the area” (p. 319) and predicted that leadership based on relationships between leaders and followers (transactional leadership and transformational leadership) would be surpassed (p. 317), being substituted by leadership based on the activity and the theory of action (distributed leadership). Although he was right with regards to the domination of transformative leadership, his predictions on distributed were not fulfilled overall, but we have observed progress towards this type of leadership, especially in the field of education.

## 4. Conclusions

In recent years we have seen a veritable explosion in the number of publications on leadership in all areas, but especially in the field of economics. The academic literature on leadership has steadily increased since 1956; much increasing growth in 2000 and experiencing even greater growth from 2005.

Another aspect worth highlighting is that the vast majority of publications in the economic field and many of the publications in the field of education are focused on the model of transformational and charismatic leadership that originated in the field of politics. The most cited publications in the field of politics do not appear to reflect this kind of leadership and are more concerned with issues related to power. In the field of education the jump was made from transformational leadership to more distributed leadership, focused on learning, although the transformational model is still very much alive.

Also, it is worth noting that the most vitality is seen in the educational field – without being the field with the highest number of publications – and it has shown tremendous progress in recent years. This area has moved from the transformational model towards more democratic and shared models, which can also be observed in the economic field, but is not covered in the political literature, which is anchored in specific issues such as power distribution and international conflicts. In these times when great authors, such as Henry Mintzberg (2009), recommend rethinking management and leadership in a less heroic and more communitarian sense, the literature on distributed leadership retrieved from the Web of Science, following the same criteria used for other searches (retrieved on January 20, 2014), reflects the greatest vitality of distributed leadership in the field of education. There are 62 articles in the Web of Science on distributed leadership, 38 of which are in the field of education, 18 in the field of business and none of them are from the field of politics. It must be noted that distributed leadership does not originate from the world of education, but from the field of economics in the 80's (Brown & Hosking, 1986), or perhaps even earlier (Gibb, 1968) and developed itself later on through the work of Gronn in the field of education (1999, 2000). In the same way that transformational leadership originated from the world of politics and was taken on by other fields where it evolved and strengthened, distributed leadership originates from the field of economics, but it is experiencing its greatest growth in the field of education, possibly due to the special and more democratic features of educational organizations.

Finally, we note that in the course of its history, leadership has been studied by various disciplines and despite all efforts there is no sign of an approach between these areas. In some cases studies become multidisciplinary (psychology, economics, education) and in others each discipline goes its separate way (politics and public administration). We do not appear to have reached true interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity as the borders between areas remain well reinforced with some permeability between the economic and educational area. However, the political area follows a different path and there is no sign that this might change in the near future. From a positive point of view this lack of transdisciplinarity favors specialization and further deepening in each area. In a negative sense, this lack of transdisciplinarity implies that few summative synergies are being created and that there may be repetitions or overlaps between areas.

Although many voices call for interdisciplinary research across disciplines when analyzing leadership, guidance and integration of theories is still limited. However, the approach may be increasingly necessary as it will become increasingly unlikely for solutions to come from a single thematic area, in such a complex world (König, Diehl, Tscherning & Helming, 2013). We should aim for a greater level of “accumulativity” in research results in the various areas, as Bryman (2004: 746) suggests, and see if we can find common ground (Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012: 502). Thus, an effort towards integration of theories across disciplines is recommended.

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