WHAT HAS BEEN MISSING IN LEADER EMERGENCE? A SYSTEMATIC EXPLORATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The study aims to address the fragmented state of leader emergence research by identifying crucial theoretical elements and consolidating the field through a comprehensive review of existing literature. The objective is to pinpoint areas where knowledge is lacking and strategize for future undertakings in this dispersed field.

Theoretical Framework: This study employs a Systematic Literature Review approach to elucidate the concept, delineate the current knowledge, and propose opportunities for future research. The PRISMA method is utilized to report the process and results of the study.

Method: This paper employs bibliometric and content analysis to examine the literature on leader emergence, drawing from 73 selected articles from reputable journals.

Results and Discussion: Research on leader emergence is currently constrained by overlapping terms and a lack of comprehensive investigation into the psychological mechanisms underlying this process. Past research has utilized a diverse range of theories, predominantly from Western settings, which has led to a lack of cohesion in the findings. Additional research is required in three crucial areas: theory, methodology, and context-related advancement.

Research Implications: The findings of this study contribute to the development of the Leader Emergence theory by clarifying conceptual boundaries with other related terms, pinpointing areas that need further investigation, providing clarity on findings, and establishing a theoretical framework using the AMO model.

Originality/Value: This study enhances the fundamental understanding of leader emergence, providing a solid foundation for future research, presenting a conceptual model of the leader emergence process, mapping variables explored, and highlighting potential areas for future research.

Keywords: Leader Emergence, Leader Emerging Process, Systematic Literature Review, Leader Development.

O QUE FALTA NA EMERGÊNCIA DO LÍDER? UMA EXPLORAÇÃO SISTEMÁTICA E DIREÇÕES DE PESQUISA FUTURA

RESUMO

Objetivo: O estudo visa abordar o estado fragmentado da investigação sobre a emergência de líderes, identificando elementos teóricos cruciais e consolidando o campo através de uma revisão abrangente da literatura existente. O objetivo é identificar áreas onde falta conhecimento e traçar estratégias para futuros empreendimentos neste campo disperso.

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Quer: Ha faltado en la emergencia del líder? Una exploración sistemática y direcciones futuras de la investigación

Referencial Teórico: Este estudio emplea una abordaje de Revisión Sistemática da Literatura para elucidar o conceito, delinear o conhecimento atual e propor oportunidades para pesquisas futuras. O método PRISMA é utilizado para relatar o processo e os resultados do estudo.

Método: Este artigo emprega análise bibliométrico e de conteúdo para examinar a literatura sobre emergência de líderes, com base em 73 artigos selecionados de periódicos conceituados.

Resultados e Discussão: A investigação sobre a emergência de líderes é actualmente limitada pela sobreposição de termos e pela falta de investigação abrangente sobre os mecanismos psicológicos subjacentes a este processo. Pesquisas anteriores utilizaram uma gama diversificada de teorias, predominantemente de contextos ocidentais, o que levou a uma falta de coesão nas conclusões. Pesquisas adicionais são necessárias em três áreas cruciais: teoria, metodologia e avanço relacionado ao contexto.

Implicações da Pesquisa: As conclusões deste estudo contribuem para o desenvolvimento da teoria da Emergência do Líder, esclarecendo os limites conceituais com outros termos relacionados, identificando áreas que precisam de mais investigação, fornecendo clareza sobre os resultados e estabelecendo uma estrutura teórica usando o modelo AMO.

Originalidade/Valor: Este estudo aprimora a compreensão fundamental da emergência de líderes, fornecendo uma base sólida para pesquisas futuras, apresentando um modelo conceitual do processo de emergência de líderes, mapeando variáveis exploradas e destacando áreas potenciais para pesquisas futuras.

1 INTRODUCTION

Leader emergence is a crucial area of study in the field of leadership and organizational behavior, where the importance lies in its ability to enhance the effectiveness of individuals, groups, and organizations, ultimately leading to overall business success (Cogliser et al., 2012; Foti & Hauenstein, 2007; Hanna et al., 2021). This phenomenon pertains to how individuals in a group gain recognition, influence, and authority, eventually taking on a leader position (Jiang et al., 2021; Truninger et al., 2021). While this conceptual lens offers foundational insights into LE, it often needs more precision regarding the contextual nuances inherent in research endeavors. In addition, the significant focus on measurement indicates a substantial area of investigation within LE research. Aycan et al. (2022) emphasize that the primary objective of LE research is to identify the factors that influence the quantification of LE, requiring careful examination of the conceptual aspects involved. Gaining an in-depth comprehension of the processes that determine how leaders are chosen is crucial, as it reveals the complex interaction of factors that influence the selection of individuals for leadership positions in different organizational environments (Acton et al., 2019; Lemoine et al., 2016; Tabassum et al., 2023).

Previous research has explored leader emergence and its associated determinants. However, some underlying issues still hinder the current comprehension and advancement in this field. First, the absence of a precise and consistent definition for LE has led to its interchangeable use with other terms like "leadership emergence" and "emergent leadership." This ambiguity complicates future comparative and replicative studies, poses challenges to theory development, and introduces operational confusion that can adversely impact data collection (Tahtinen & Havila, 2019). Second, despite the growing body of research, previous studies on the factors that contribute to LE yield fragmented findings. These studies focused primarily on individual traits as predictors of LE, with less attention given to the important role of group dynamics and contextual influences (Cogliser et al., 2012; Cox et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2020). The limited comprehension of LE poses a challenge to attaining cohesive research objectives, potentially leading to disjointed or dispersed study outcomes. Further exploration of these underexamined or understudied domains holds the potential to
uncover novel insights and facilitate study replication across diverse contexts (Aycan et al., 2022).

This study employs bibliometric analysis and systematic literature review (SLR) to examine factors influencing LE, identifying patterns and critical subjects across academic disciplines (Anggadwita & Indarti, 2023; Terán-Yépez et al., 2020). Our comprehensive review offers a thorough understanding of the topic by mapping intellectual terrain and highlighting research gaps and trends. Thus, the following inquiries guide our investigation:

RQ1. What is the research profile of previous LE studies?
RQ2. How is LE conceptualized and differentiated from other related terms?
RQ3. What are the fundamental theories that form the basis of LE studies?
RQ4. How are the primary factors that contribute to LE analyzed and represented using the AMO (antecedents, mediator/moderator, and outcomes) framework?
RQ5. What are the prospective recommendations for future research?

This study provides an essential contribution to the growing field of LE by conducting an extensive and systematic evaluation of the existing literature. The bibliometric analysis illuminates the intellectual landscape by identifying key authors, influential works, and prominent journals, thus providing a foundation for improving the comprehension of LE. Additionally, this analysis unveils evolving research trends and underexplored areas, empowering future researchers to align their endeavors with current interests and delve into uncharted facets of LE. This study contributes to the academic discussion on LE by promoting interdisciplinary collaboration while encouraging the advancement of theoretical frameworks. The cross-contextual and cross-subfield comparisons reveal both shared patterns and contextual nuances, enhancing our comprehension of the factors influencing LE dynamics. Furthermore, the quantitative insights derived from bibliometric analysis facilitate the synthesis of findings across multiple studies. Ultimately, the findings inform future research agendas and resource allocation, advancing the approach to knowledge enhancement of LE.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, involving a thorough examination of relevant articles and the use of descriptive statistics to create a comprehensive profile and analyze the topic of LE. This approach guarantees an objective and transparent analysis, thereby reducing any potential bias (Anggadwita & Indarti, 2023; Talwar et al., 2020). The systematic review process follows a four-step framework: formulating a
review plan, establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria, developing a data screening strategy, and analyzing and synthesizing collected data (Newman & Gough, 2020; Talwar et al., 2020). By adhering to this methodological approach, the study's significance is emphasized and future replication endeavors can be facilitated (Anggadwita & Indarti, 2023; Indarti et al., 2020; Talwar et al., 2020).

2.1 REVIEW PLANNING; CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

In order to ensure the integrity of the data, SLR involves a meticulous procedure that establishes research inquiries and methodologies (Chauhan et al., 2022; Newman & Gough, 2020; Talwar et al., 2020). It involves establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria, evaluating the relevance of articles on LE through peer-reviewed journal publications, and excluding those not pertinent to the topic (Meline, 2006; Podsakoff et al., 2005; Ross-Hellauer, 2017). Articles unrelated to LE were consequently excluded from the analysis.

2.2 DATA RETRIEVAL AND SELECTION

Figure 1 outlines the steps for data selection and collection. We employed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to ensure transparency and completeness enhancing the credibility and reliability of our review results (Moher et al., 2010; Page et al., 2021). We used the Scopus Database as a single source to collect articles related to the topics. Scopus is considered the most powerful database for high-quality articles (Burnham, 2006). Our initial keywords were ”leader emergence,” ”leader development,” and ”emergence of a leader.” However, we found the term to be interchangeably used with ”leadership emergence,” ”emergent leadership,” ”leader development,” and ”development of a leader.” Consequently, we utilize all related terms as keywords for conducting searches.
Figure 1

Systematic search and selection strategies on leader emergence

Search-keyword combinations
Search String: "leader* emergence" OR "leadership emergence" OR "leader* development" OR "leadership development" OR "emergence of leader*" OR "emergence of leadership" OR "emergent leadership"

The selection process involved a thorough screening of 278 articles published prior to December 2023. After evaluating titles and keywords, 178 articles were eliminated due to a lack of specific references to LE. The second screening analyzed abstracts, removing 14 irrelevant papers. After a thorough evaluation, 68 articles were selected based on the inclusion

Source: Prepared by Authors (2023)
and exclusion criteria in Table 1 and the quality of the study (i.e., the validity and relevance of the theory used, the method used, and the strength of the analysis). To ensure the inclusion of all pertinent papers, we looked over the citations of the 68 studies that had been previously chosen. The final selection included 5 relevant papers, increasing the total to 73.

2.3 DATA ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

The data analysis and synthesis stage involves obtaining relevant articles, profiling the study, examining factors like publication year, source, publisher, and research design, and content analysis to identify leader emergence concepts, factors, and areas for further research (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The AMO framework analyzes textual information through content analysis, combining deductive and inductive techniques (e.g., Anggadwita and Indarti, 2023; Parmigiani and King, 2019; Zahoor et al., 2020). This approach categorizes outcomes and identifies mediators and moderators affecting leader emergence (Parmigiani & King, 2019). This methodology allows researchers to investigate causal relationships between factors and specific outcomes (Ghezzi et al., 2018; Proudfoot, 2022).

3 RESULTS

3.1 THE PROFILING OF REVIEWED ARTICLES

Our initial investigation involves conducting research profiling based on publication year, journal domain, and methodologies to identify and analyze research trends.

3.1.1 Research Trends Based On Publication Year

The first academic article on leader emergence dates back to 1979 (see Figure 2), with a notable surge in publications observed in 2012. During this period, studies primarily focused on understanding the factors contributing to individuals assuming leadership roles within groups (Ho et al., 2012; Walter et al., 2012). Researchers analyzed patterns or configurations of personal qualities rather than solely investigating the individual impacts of isolated attributes on behavior (Emery, 2012; Emery et al., 2011). Moreover, investigations emphasized the significance of group-related variables (Cogliser et al., 2012; Ho et al., 2012; Walter et al.,
2012), indicating a transition towards a more comprehensive understanding of individual behavior, including leadership establishment.

**Figure 2**

*The Trend of Study based on Publication Year.*

![Graph showing the trend of study based on publication year.](image)

Source: Prepared by Authors (2023)

The data from the past five years indicates an upward trend in the quantity of published works (see Figure 2). Several factors may contribute to the occurrence: (1) The growing need for expanding beyond individual traits to include contextual factors that influence leader emergence (Chang et al., 2021; Cox et al., 2022; Samdanis & Lee, 2021). (2) The emergence of remote work, virtual teams, and flatter organizational structures has brought about significant shifts in work environments (Purvanova et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2021), especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. (3) The growing focus on diversity and inclusion in leadership has increased interest in understanding how diverse individuals emerge as leaders (Hanna et al., 2021). (4) Advances in research methods, such as social network analysis and longitudinal studies, have provided new tools for studying leader emergence (Truninger et al., 2021).

### 3.1.2 Research Trends Based On Publication Domain And Quality Of The Journal

The 73 articles that had been selected were distributed among 13 publishers and 33 journals (see Figure 3 and Table 2). Elsevier (*n* = 25) and Sage (*n* = 16) publishers are the most significant contributors to Leader Emergence-related publications. Meanwhile, Leadership Quarterly (*n* = 19) and Frontiers in Psychology (*n* = 7) were the journals with the most...
significant contributions. The journals included in the study can be classified as high-quality, falling within the range of Q1 \((n = 29)\), Q2 \((n = 3)\), and Q3 \((n = 1)\). These journals have scientific journal ranking (SJR) values ranging from 0.35 to 10.91, with an average value of 3.51.

**Figure 3**

*Total Articles per Publisher (1979-2023).*

![Graph showing total articles per publisher (1979-2023).](image)

Source: Prepared by Authors (2023)

According to Table 1, the predominant subject area addressed in the published articles is psychology \((n = 53)\). Among these, 60% pertain to the applied sub-domain \((n = 32)\), 26% to general topics in miscellaneous categories \((n = 14)\), 9% to social psychology \((n = 5)\), and 4% to developmental and educational topics \((n = 2)\).
### Table 1

**Journal Rank (SJR) and Title**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Domain</th>
<th>Sub Domain</th>
<th>Journal Titles</th>
<th>Journal Rank (SJR - 2021)</th>
<th>Total Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arts and Humanities</strong></td>
<td>Human Relations</td>
<td>Q1 (3.51)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group Processes and Intergroup Relations</td>
<td>Q1 (1.63)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acta Psychologica</td>
<td>Q1 (0.64)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business and International</strong></td>
<td>Management Academy of Management Journal</td>
<td>Q1 (10.91)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Journal of Management Studies</td>
<td>Q1 (4.49)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journal of World Business</td>
<td>Q1 (3.25)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journal of Leadership and Organizational</td>
<td>Q1 (1.1)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Studies European Management Review</td>
<td>Q1 (1.1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business, Management, &amp;</strong></td>
<td>Leadership and Organization Development</td>
<td>Q1 (1.01)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accounting</strong></td>
<td>Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and</td>
<td>Q1 (0.79)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Applied Journal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economics &amp; Finance</strong></td>
<td>Social Enterprise Journal</td>
<td>Q1 (0.62)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Finance</strong></td>
<td>Journal of Management</td>
<td>Q1 (7.21)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industrial Relations</strong></td>
<td>IEEE Transactions on Professional</td>
<td>Q2 (0.37)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Management of</strong></td>
<td>Organization Science</td>
<td>Q1 (6.54)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology &amp; Innovation</td>
<td>Applied Journal of Applied Psychology</td>
<td>Q1 (6.13)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership Quarterly</td>
<td>Q1 (4.33)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journal of Organizational Behavior</td>
<td>Q1 (3.8)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personnel Psychology</td>
<td>Q1 (3.75)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human Resource Management Review</td>
<td>Q1 (3.11)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journal of Business and Psychology</td>
<td>Q1 (2.52)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group and Organization Management</td>
<td>Q1 (1.74)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Small Group Research</td>
<td>Q1 (1.13)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Psychology</strong></td>
<td>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</td>
<td>Q1 (3.8)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>European Journal of Personality and Social</td>
<td>Q1 (2.87)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychology Bulletin</td>
<td>Q1 (2.24)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journal of Personality</td>
<td>Q1 (2.19)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Behavior and Personality</td>
<td>Q3 (0.35)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Developmental and Educational</strong></td>
<td>Sex Roles</td>
<td>Q1 (1.31)</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td><strong>Miscellaneous</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personality and Individual Differences</td>
<td>Q1 (1.46)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frontiers in Psychology</td>
<td>Q2 (0.89)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Current Psychology</td>
<td>Q2 (0.66)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sociology &amp; Political</strong></td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Q1 (0.87)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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3.1.3 The Methodologies, Units Of Analysis, And Geographical Classifications

As indicated in Table 2, the research methodologies employed in the studies can be classified into three primary categories: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. According to the results, a significant portion of the studies, 67% \((n = 49)\), employed a quantitative approach. This approach encompasses various methods such as; experimental including both laboratory \((n = 14)\) and field settings \((n = 2)\), longitudinal including multi-wave \((n = 10)\), meta-analysis \((n = 3)\), panel data \((n = 2)\), phenomography \((n = 2)\), and behavioral genetics \((n = 1)\). Both qualitative and mixed-method approaches employed by each 16% \((n = 12)\) of the studies. The qualitative approach consists of literature review \((n = 6)\), case study \((n = 4)\), case study \((n = 1)\), and interview \((n = 1)\).

Furthermore, the majority 42% of the research was conducted at the individual level \((n = 31)\), 37% at the multilevel, encompassing individual and team \((n = 27)\), and 12% at the general level, which includes analysis from all sides \((n = 9)\). 5% at the team level \((n = 4)\), and 1% for each both at the organizational and national levels \((n = 1)\). Focusing on leader emergence at the individual level offers valuable insights that can guide leader development and planning, contributing to more effective organizational leadership (Bracht et al., 2021; Paunova, 2015, 2017). However, integrating individual and team-level perspectives can help organizations develop them strategically (Acton et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2022; Hanna et al., 2021).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Methodology</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Organizational</th>
<th>Multi-level (Individual &amp; Team)</th>
<th>Nation-Level</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>Literature Review</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Descriptive Study</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experimental Study - Laboratory</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>Experimental Study - Field</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Longitudinal Study</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Case Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meta-analyses</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Mix-Methods</td>
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<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Finally, we conducted a setting analysis of the subject countries according to their regional classification (see Figure 4). Western settings accounted for the most significant number of studies, comprising 60% (n=44) of the articles; 55% of them were conducted in the United States, 20% (n = 9) in Europe, 9% (n = 4) in Canada, 7% each in the UK and multi-country settings (n = 3), and 2% in Latin America (n = 1). The analysis showed that articles with Eastern settings constituted only 18% of the sample (n = 13). Among these, the majority, accounting for 46% (n = 6), were conducted in China. Additionally, 23% (n = 3) of the articles were conducted in Southeast Asia, while 15% (n = 2) in the Middle East. The remaining 8% each (n = 1) were set in West and South Asia. 4% of the studies were conducted globally, which included countries from cross-settings. Finally, the remaining 18% consists of articles that do not specify a geographic setting, such as conceptual papers and literature reviews.

**Figure 4**

*Regional Classification of Research Settings.*

![Regional Classification of Research Settings](image-url)
3.2 UNVEILING LEADER EMERGENCE: CONCEPTUALIZATION, DEFINITION, AND DISTINCTIONS

The term "leader emergence" was among the first to appear, yet no definitive definition serves as the primary point of reference in recorded articles. The earliest publication in our records defines leader emergence as the process through which an individual is selected or emerges as the leader within a group (Garland & Beard, 1979). This concept revolves around the perception of an individual as a leader (Judge et al., 2002; Paunova, 2015), leading to considerable research focusing on identifying leadership attributes until recently (Chen & Li, 2023).

Our investigation has revealed that the term "leader emergence" is frequently used interchangeably with phrases such as "Leadership Emergence" and "Emergent Leadership." However, upon closer examination, we have identified subtle distinctions between these terms that influence their usage in research, where LE was the earliest to appear (Garland & Beard, 1979). Drawing from various explanations in earlier studies, leader emergence refers to how an individual attains a leadership position, either through formal election or through consensus among subordinates at the team or organizational level (Atwater et al., 1999; Garland & Beard, 1979; Gershenoff & Foti, 2003). Walter, Cole, and Humphrey's 2012 study expanded the understanding of leader emergence to encompass both formal and informal dimensions (Walter et al., 2012). This informal dimension, which emphasizes leader-like responsibilities and authority, underscores others' perceptions of one's leadership abilities and an individual's self-perception as a leader (Chen & Li, 2023; Gheorghe & Curșeu, 2023; Landis et al., 2022; Truninger et al., 2021).

Leadership emergence emerges later as an alternative term, referring to the attainment of informal leadership status among group members, often through peer recognition (Atwater et al., 1999; Dinh & Lord, 2012). On the other hand, Emergent leadership highlights the natural evolution of leaders, irrespective of hierarchical systems (Chaturvedi et al., 2012; Hanna et al., 2021; Tabassum et al., 2023). Although sharing similarities with leadership emergence, it extends its focus to leaders-group-task dynamics, intermittent emergence, and underscores the importance of peer evaluation of individual team members, emphasizing the circumstances and reasons behind their emergence as leaders within a specific context (Hanna et al., 2021).

We then endeavored to delineate related terminology by incorporating interim leadership into a matrix (see Figure 5). Interim leadership involves assuming a provisional position of authority for a defined period, often due to appointment to fill the vacancy left by an existing
leader figure. Typically, these leaders serve as placeholders and exert minimal to no influence on the team dynamics.

**Figure 5**

*The Difference between Leader Emergence and Other Terminologies*

![Diagram](image)

Source: Prepared by Authors (2023)

Enhancing clarity regarding terminology distinctions enhances the utility of the LE concept, encompassing both self-perception and recognition by followers (Bracht et al., 2021; Lim, 2019). While previous research has predominantly explored leader emergence through follower perceptions, comprehensive assessments should encompass both behavioral and perceptual dimensions (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2021). Perceptual aspects gauge how individuals are perceived as leaders, whereas behavioral aspects involve how they assume leadership roles. Moreover, several studies underscore the importance of incorporating self-reports to capture individuals' willingness to emerge as leaders (Kennedy et al., 2021).

### 3.3 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK UNDERLYING THE FACTORS DRIVING LEADER EMERGENCE

The analysis discovered the application of 39 underlying theories (Figure 6). Despite the prevailing emphasis on contextual factors, the intrinsic qualities of leaders remain a crucial determinant in contemporary studies (Blake et al., 2022; Olinover et al., 2023). Consequently, leadership trait theory emerged as predominantly utilized across most studies ($n = 15$). This theory is often complemented by other theoretical frameworks aimed at discerning the
underlying traits of leaders, including social cognitive theory (Bracht et al., 2021), self-determination theory (Aycan & Shelia, 2019), self-efficacy theory (Liu et al., 2023), Gender Role Theory (Gershenoff & Foti, 2003), Heider’s attribution theory (Gheorghe & Curșeu, 2023), and regulatory focus theory (Härtel et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2022). These theories contribute to understanding the factors that differentiate a leader from a follower, although they represent just one component of a broader conundrum.

The second and third most widely used theories are Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Role Congruity Theory (RCT) \((each \ n = 4)\). SIT helps explain why specific individuals are recognized and accepted as leaders by their peers in specific contexts (Roth, 2022). Similarly, RCT posits that a leader's perceived effectiveness is influenced by how closely their attributes align with the expectations of a leadership role (del Carmen Triana et al., 2023; Kwok et al., 2018). Other theories, such as Person-Environment Fit (Lisak & Erez, 2015), Role (Chang et al., 2021), Social Comparison (Atwater et al., 1999), Cognitive Resource (Norton et al., 2014), The Rank-based Theory of Social Class Identity (Loignon & Kodydek, 2022), and Relational Discrepancy Theory (Acton et al., 2019), have been identified as supporting similar viewpoints.

Furthermore, the Expectation States Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Social Role Theory are the third most frequently utilized theories \((n = 3 \ for \ each \ theory)\). These theories emphasize the importance of reciprocal and interactional nature in this progression. Several other theories supporting the same viewpoint identified are Socioanalytic (Marinova et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2020), Leader-Member Exchange (Guastello, 2007), Social Network (Landis et al., 2022; Serban et al., 2015), Balance (Zeng et al., 2023), Emergent Leadership Theory (Emery et al., 2013), and Team Effectiveness Theory (Mitchell & Coyle, 2019).

The fourth broadly used theory encompasses the emotional aspect of LE, which includes Attachment Theory \((n = 2)\). It suggests that individuals form distinct attachment styles due to early life experiences, which can impact their conduct in relationships, particularly between leaders and followers (Cogliser et al., 2012). Other theories providing similar viewpoints are the Affect-as-Information Theory (Sirén et al., 2020), Affective Events Theory (Sirén et al., 2020), Lazarus’s Appraisal Theory of Emotions (Aycan & Shelia, 2019), and Relational Leadership Theory (Emery, 2012). Other remaining theories have been used to capture different perspectives of leader emergence \((n=1)\). However, their contributions further fragment the existing knowledge on the subject.
3.4 ANTECEDENTS, MEDIATORS, AND MODERATORS OF LEADER EMERGENCE

The AMO framework was used to analyze variables in studies on leader emergence over 44 years (1979-2023). Although most studies used a singular perspective, the AMO can suggest the potential for framework integration and leveling. The antecedent variables were categorized into individual, group/team, and organizational/environmental levels. The individual-level
antecedents are then grouped into several categories. First, Personal characteristics, including the cognitive ability (Atwater et al., 1999; Cogliser et al., 2012; Emery, 2012; Olinover et al., 2023; Serban et al., 2015), self-esteem (Atwater et al., 1999; Brunell et al., 2008; Ensari et al., 2011), self-efficacy (Bracht et al., 2021; Foti & Hauenstein, 2007; Oh, 2012; Serban et al., 2015; Türetgen et al., 2008), various personality types (e.g., Chen and Li, 2023; Conard, 2020; Gruda and McCleskey, 2022; Kennedy et al., 2021; Landis et al., 2022; Loignon and Kodydek, 2022; Spark et al., 2022; Wilson et al., 2021), neuroticism-prevention focus (Aycan & Shelia, 2019), dark triad traits (Brunell et al., 2008; Conard, 2020; Härtel et al., 2023; Kennedy et al., 2021; Nevicka et al., 2011), and achievement-description factors (Conard, 2020; Marinova et al., 2013; Purvanova et al., 2021; Samdanis & Lee, 2021).

The second category is emotional regulation, which includes emotional intelligence (Côté et al., 2010; Emery, 2012), emotion recognition and regulation (Sirén et al., 2020; Walter et al., 2012), avoidant-anxious attachments (Yang et al., 2020), and anticipation of image risk (Cunningham et al., 2023). Third, leadership approaches, including leader's image (Sarker et al., 2009), task and relationship-oriented behaviors (Mitchell & Coyle, 2019; Olinover et al., 2023), vocal delivery and leader competency (Truninger et al., 2021), and type of humor (Gheorghe & Curșeu, 2023). Fourth, expertise, including prior influence work experiences (Atwater et al., 1999; Ilac, 2018; Oh, 2012), knowledge, skills, and abilities (Cogliser et al., 2012; Thomas & Hirschfeld, 2015), and education (Spark et al., 2022). Fifth, person-environment factors which include learning disabilities (Luria et al., 2014), comfort with technology (Serban et al., 2015), proactive behavior (Thomas & Hirschfeld, 2015), cultural-related aspects (Lisak & Erez, 2015), and physical attractiveness (Gruber et al., 2018). Sixth, social and identity aspects, including social skill (Ensari et al., 2011), leader role identity (Kwok et al., 2018), personal experiences and subjective meanings (Ilac, 2018), self-schema activation (Acton et al., 2019), reputation (Tackett et al., 2023), regulatory focus (promotion and prevention focus) (Aycan & Shelia, 2019; Zhao et al., 2022), and social status (Tackett et al., 2023). The seventh category is the persona, which includes self-promotion behaviors (Lim, 2019) and leader self-awareness and self-leadership (Bracht et al., 2021). Eighth, traits' facets include the facets of conscientiousness (Marinova et al., 2013) and the honesty-humility dimension (Ogunfowora & Bourdage, 2014). Finally, leadership motives, including social power motives (Li et al., 2023), round out the classification.

Group/team-level antecedents are categorized into; first, task-related factors, including types of the task assigned (Garland & Beard, 1979), task framing (Ho et al., 2012), and team dynamics and emergent states (Hanna et al., 2021). Second, leadership nomination and
perception, including leader nomination (Emery et al., 2011), perceived leadership fit (Norton et al., 2014), and perceived agency and communion (Schock et al., 2019). Third, group characteristics and composition, including initial friendships (Emery, 2012), group size (Lemoine et al., 2016; MacLaren et al., 2020), total amount of leadership within the group (Lemoine et al., 2016), and group gender composition (Lemoine et al., 2016). Finally, social network, which includes in- and out-degree centrality (Zeng et al., 2023).

Organizational/ environmental-level antecedents are categorized into; first, cultural and sociocultural factors, including sociocultural values (Oh, 2012), cultural tightness and gender egalitarianism (Toh & Leonardelli, 2012), the initial conditions in the organization (Virtaharju & Liiri, 2019), including supervisors' practices and identity conflict (Virtaharju & Liiri, 2019), cultural attributes (Popper, 2021), and objective social class, subjective social class, and familiarity with the task (Loignon & Kodydek, 2022). Second, supervisory and organizational factors, including formal supervisors' initiating structure, consideration, and status (Briker et al., 2021), and well-communicated role expectations from higher-level management (Chang et al., 2021). Third, environmental and contextual factors, including genetic and environmental factors (Chaturvedi et al., 2012), crises and the human longing for competent and caring figures (Popper, 2021), and contextual factors (Cox et al., 2022). Lastly, social and networking include social context, opportunity patterns, social network, clustering (Roth, 2022), and extracurricular activity event strength (Zhao et al., 2022).

Mediator and moderator variables are divided into external and internal factors, where external mediator factors consist of; first, communication and interaction factors, including communication process (Hanna et al., 2021), interaction mode (Wilson et al., 2021), trust and open display of skills (Roth, 2022), and psychological distance (Popper, 2021). Second, leadership and supervisor behavior, including the perceived competence of leaders (Ho et al., 2012), task coordination behavior (Walter et al., 2012), the balance between perceived agency and communion (Schock et al., 2019), team leaders’ authentic leadership, supervisor’s ethical efficacy expectation and unethical behavior–punishment expectation (Chang et al., 2021) and team members' initiating structure and consideration (Briker et al., 2021). Third, social and team dynamics, which include trust, helping role perceptions, helping behavior, and competitiveness (Marinova et al., 2013), socially oriented factors (Hanna et al., 2021), positive deviance and identity work (Samdanis & Lee, 2021), and confirmation or rejection of enactment by others (Acton et al., 2019). Fourth, network and development factors include social network centrality (Kwok et al., 2018) and supervisor development programs (Virtaharju & Liiri, 2019).
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The internal mediators include; first, behavioral and personality traits, which encompass task and social-oriented behavior (Cogliser et al., 2012), moral disengagement (Ogunfowora & Bourdage, 2014), self-reflection and awareness (Ilac, 2018), negative emotion (Yang et al., 2020), and dominant-expressive and arrogant-aggressive behavior (Härtel et al., 2023). Second, motivation and identity factors, including the motivation to lead (Kennedy et al., 2021), self-leadership and leader self-efficacy (Bracht et al., 2021), identification with a team and behavior role typicality (Hanna et al., 2021), and endorsement of a leader identity (Cunningham et al., 2023). Third, competence and self-perception, including ascribed social competence (Gruber et al., 2018), achievement and ascription factors (Samdanis & Lee, 2021), and self-efficacy in leadership roles (Liu et al., 2023). Finally, communication and interaction are represented by speaking time (MacLaren et al., 2020).

The external mediator factors encompass various types of demographics and individual characteristics including gender (Badura et al., 2018; Garland & Beard, 1979; Hanna et al., 2021), extraversion level (Lemoine et al., 2016; Walter et al., 2012), cognitive ability, prosocial motivation, dominance level, and desire to lead (Hanna et al., 2021), extracurricular activity participation (Zhao et al., 2022), lay theories of leadership ability (Cunningham et al., 2023), and self-enhancement motives (Chang et al., 2021). External mediator variables are categorized into; first, team dynamics and relationships, including role perceptions (Marinova et al., 2013), group-level gender and extraversion (Lemoine et al., 2016), team emotion (Sirén et al., 2020), level of virtuality (Purvanova et al., 2021), leader-member status (Briker et al., 2021), and team orientation (Hanna et al., 2021). Second, work environment and context including task type (Garland & Beard, 1979), working conditions (Guastello et al., 2018), media type (Balthazard et al., 2009), culture (Badura et al., 2018; Blake et al., 2022; Oh, 2012; Popper, 2021; Roth, 2022), situational stress and effective leader behavior (Norton et al., 2014), team cohesion (Sarker et al., 2009), reward interdependence (Nevicka et al., 2011), team dispersion, conflict, network centrality, and virtuality (Hanna et al., 2021), interaction time and social complexity (Badura et al., 2018), and negative perceptions of organizational climate and justice (Chang et al., 2021).

Finally, the outcomes include general leader emergence (such as, Atwater et al., 1999; Cunningham et al., 2023; Garland and Beard, 1979; Walter et al., 2012) variable encompassing leadership emergence (e.g., Côté et al., 2010; Gershenoff and Foti, 2003; Härtel et al., 2023) and emergent leadership (e.g., Cox et al., 2022; Emery et al., 2013; Hanna et al., 2021), and specific type of leader including transformational (Balthazard et al., 2009), woman (Toh & Leonardelli, 2012), remote (Sarker et al., 2009), creative (Samdanis & Lee, 2021), value-based
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(Chang et al., 2021), task- and relationship-oriented (Emery et al., 2013), leadership in LGD (Ensari et al., 2011), and leader nomination (Bracht et al., 2021), potential (Thomas & Hirschfeld, 2015), and intention (Kennedy et al., 2021)
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Figure 7
The AMO Framework of Leader Emergence.

Source: Prepared by Authors (2023)
4 DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

The study highlights three areas that require further investigation: theory advancement, methodological refinement, and contextual exploration.

4.1 THEORY ADVANCEMENT

The initial step involves providing a conceptual definition of LE, discerning it from related terms such as leadership emergence and emergent leadership. Past studies have often misapplied these terms, potentially impeding the progression of LE theory and leading to inadequate contextual understanding. Future studies should focus on proper terminology to ensure clarity. LE encompasses formal and informal leadership, considering their long-term implications (Truninger et al., 2021; Walter et al., 2012). Additionally, it involves self-view development (Emery et al., 2011), placing importance on individual internal processes. However, the mechanisms underlying it have yet to be explored.

Most studies have focused on a singular perspective, resulting in a fragmented comprehension of the factors that contribute to it. LE is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple factors, and a single theory may not suffice to explain it (Acton et al., 2019). Thus, incorporating complementary theories or adopting more comprehensive behavioral paradigms can enhance future studies. Furthermore, given the interchangeable utilization of terms, there is a need for a thorough remapping of factors that genuinely contribute to LE.

Several aspects are necessary to comprehend leader emergence, including individual traits, characteristics, and behavioral patterns. Differentiating between achievement and ascription highlights the diverse pathways of leader emergence and requires further study (Purnova et al., 2020). Previous research has identified several external factors that may impact the emergence of leaders. However, the role, position, and how these factors interact with the individual and overall process still need to be fully understood. Gender gap (Badura et al., 2018), social backlash (Cunningham et al., 2023), and social class (Loignon & Kodydek, 2022) are among the exploration agenda mentioned by prior studies that may affect one's consideration to be a leader.

Finally, research trends point to exploring the emergence of specific types of leaders. Prior investigations have been initiated into creative (Samdanis & Lee, 2021), value-based (Chang et al., 2021), and transformational (Balthazard et al., 2009) that are amenable to
alternative leadership approaches and still require further research. Gaining comprehension and discerning influencing factors can facilitate a more comprehensive theoretical understanding and provide a pathway to more precise practical implications.

4.2 METHODOLOGICAL REFINEMENT

The analysis reveals that surveys and laboratory experiments are the primary methods used in previous research to study LE (see Table 3). The majority of surveys are designed to gauge the opinions of subordinates regarding the character, behavior, and nominations of leaders (for example, MacLaren et al., 2020; Sirén et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2020). However, self-view is a crucial concept in LE, emphasizing how individuals perceive themselves as leaders (Bracht et al., 2021; Emery et al., 2011). To account for this in measurement, it is necessary to contemplate a multi-rater approach to surveys. Multi-rater methodology in survey research enhances reliability and validity by collecting feedback from multiple sources (McCarren et al., 2016). It considers different perspectives and is suitable for complex aspects. Researchers can also supplement the data with focus groups or qualitative interviews.

Furthermore, LE research underutilizes field experimental, multilevel, and longitudinal designs (Purvanova et al., 2021). To establish causality and understand the dynamic processes that shape leaders over time, future studies may use more rigorous research designs, such as longitudinal and experimental methods (Kennedy et al., 2021; Purvanova et al., 2021; Sirén et al., 2020). Multilevel research is suggested to comprehend leader emergence phenomena within organizations and teams (Blake et al., 2022). Further improvements in methodology can enhance the dependability and relevance of forthcoming leader emergence studies.

4.3 METHODOLOGICAL REFINEMENT

The existing body of literature exhibits a lack of attention on the impact of social context, focusing on social exchange within teams. This can lead to an excessively optimistic perception of leader emergence, potentially causing inappropriate selection and retention (Tackett et al., 2023). Further research should investigate the influence of social context on the leader emergence process, including supporting elements and barriers, and the nature of leader-member relationships to overcome this limitation. Integrating social context into the study can provide a more comprehensive understanding of leadership factors and enhance leadership
development. Lastly, most research focusing on Western settings also calls for more research in Eastern and global settings.

5 CONCLUSION AND LIMITATION OF RESEARCH

The LE process is multifaceted, encompassing elements from both internal and external sources. An individual’s attributes and capabilities are influenced internally by their traits, skills, behaviors, and personal characteristics. However, their inclination to pursue leadership roles is also shaped externally by organizational culture, societal norms, group dynamics, and situational challenges. To comprehend the emergence and efficacy of leaders, it is vital to comprehend the interaction between these elements.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on LE by elucidating the concept's foundational principles and emphasizing the need for future research to employ consistent terminology. In addition, we propose recommendations for future research directions by analyzing current trends, approaches, theories, and methodologies, while identifying any gaps that may exist. Nevertheless, the study is limited in scope; first, it only considers peer-reviewed scholarly articles, disregarding books, conference proceedings, theses/dissertations, and predatory journals. Thus, our investigation has been limited, possibly omitting relevant and valuable research from excluded papers. Second, our research uses bibliometrics and AMO. To provide a broader perspective, future research could employ a different framework. Finally, this study is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), which may limit its impact on empirical research and practical applications.

REFERENCES


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