The Silent Signal: A Mirror Leadership and Intercultural Communication Beyond Strategic Boundaries

Muhammad Atif Bashir[1] (iD)**, Saeed Banihashemi**[2] (iD)**, Muhammad Taimoor**[3]
(iD)**, Mohammad Fakhrul Islam**[4] (iD)**, Katalin Szabó**[5] (iD)

Corresponding Author:

Mohammad Fakhrul Islam

Faculty of Economics and Business, Széchenyi István University, Győr, Hungary. Email: islam.mohammad.fakhrul@sze.hu

Abstract: The post-pandemic work environment has intensified emotional strain, hybrid-work fatigue, and cognitive disengagement, making it increasingly difficult for leaders to sustain trust and authentic engagement in diverse, digitally disrupted teams. Existing leadership models emphasize cognition and behavior but overlook the real-time emotional, relational, and physiological processes that shape contemporary managerial dynamics. This study introduces Mirror Leadership, a novel theoretical framework grounded in Emotional Appraisal Theory (EAT) and Polyvagal Theory (PVT) to explain how leaders influence team well-being through emotional co-regulation, reflective attunement, and embodied presence. Using a conceptual research design and narrative synthesis across neuroscience, psychology, and leadership studies, the paper advances six propositions that describe how Mirror Leaders cultivate psychological safety, resilience, relational repair, and trust in hybrid and multicultural contexts. The model offers a distinct theoretical contribution by integrating cognitive appraisal mechanisms with neurophysiological processes of safety and connection, thereby reframing leadership as a symbolized, neuro-emotional, and intercultural process rather than a solely cognitive or strategic function. Findings suggest that emotionally attuned and synchronized leaders foster biologically grounded trust, intercultural cohesion, and affective stability during uncertainty. The study further outlines implications for research, including the need for empirical validation using physiological and behavioral measures, and implications for practice, such as enhancing leadership development, cross-cultural training, and emotionally intelligent management in hybrid workplaces. Mirror Leadership thus provides a foundational and globally relevant framework for understanding emotionally intelligent and culturally competent leadership in the new world of work.

Keywords: Mirror Leadership, Emotional Co-regulation, Psychological Safety, Polyvagal Theory, Emotional Intelligence

1. Introduction

The post-pandemic working environment has brought a level of emotional stress, discontinuity of hybrid work, and diminished interpersonal relationships, thus creating new difficulties facing leaders whose responsibility is to maintain trust, engagement, and psychological well-being within multi-racial teams. Although widely analyzed, forms of leadership (transformational, authentic, and servant) offer useful ideas about behavior and relationships, they are largely cognitive and do not explain how leaders can have an impact on followers due to real-time emotional sensitivity, physiological control, or intercultural affective cues (Sehrawat & Nangia, 2025). Likewise, models of emotional intelligence precede intrapersonal conscious and preconscious cognition, but rarely explain how leaders co-regulate the emotional and neurophysiological conditions of others, particularly in hybrid and digitally mediated interactions. This theoretical gap underscores the need for a leadership model that summarizes moment-to-moment emotional engagement, embodied presence, and neurophysiological processes of safety.

Mirror Leadership is a suggested study of this gap, in which the researcher provides a framework based on the Emotional Appraisal Theory and Polyvagal Theory to explain how leaders can influence psychological safety, relational trust, and intercultural cohesion by practicing emotional mirroring and co-regulation. We are experiencing a preview of a leadership revolution in the workplace, a revolution so insidious as not to be immediately detected during a strategic session or quarterly performance, but is being felt more in the tumult of emotion that pervades the presence, interaction, and engagement between individuals at the workplace (Teboul, 2025). Unlike existing leadership approaches and strategies, Mirror Leadership specifically addresses the intercultural aspect of emotional engagement, noting that leaders must interpret, mirror, and regulate emotions across diverse cultural scripts for expression, communication, and empathy. This global significance positions the theory not only as a psychological model but also as a cross-cultural model of digital age organizations. The classical approaches to understanding leadership, such as transformational, authentic, and servant leadership, have proven effective over the decades (Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2018).

[1] Institute of Business Management and Administrative Sciences, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan
[2] School of Built Environment, University of Technology Sydney, Australia
[3] Institute of Business Management and Administrative Sciences, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan
[4] Faculty of Economics and Business, Széchenyi István University, Győr, Hungary
[5] Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics, Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences (MATE), Godollő, Hungary

Nevertheless, their theoretical latitude remains very limited in clarifying how leaders address emotional interactions within hybrid, multicultural, and technologically mediated environments. These models focus on static traits and beliefs but pay less attention to the ongoing emotional exchanges, physiological co-regulation, and cognitive reflections that define human interaction in digital and hybrid settings. Subsequently, studies of leadership need a broader lens that apprehends emotional processes as they unfold in real-time, quasi-cultural, and multi-modal phenomena. (Liu & Maitlis, 2014; Marstand, Epitropaki, & Kapoutsis, 2025; Muss, Tüxen, & Fürstenau, 2025). Such models emphasize traits and intent but do not pay sufficient attention to a crucial question: how do leaders interact emotionally with their teams in real time, and how does this interaction affect trust, innovation, safety, and resilience?

This paper presents an innovative theoretical perspective on Mirror Leadership, in which the leader is viewed as a cognitive-empath and an emotional mirror, someone who acts with clarity of purpose and through the deliberate mirroring of emotional states (Jian, 2022). The leader in this model is sensitive to the emotional dynamics of a group and self-interestedly involved in self-awareness, projecting it outward by being reflective and engaging in co-regulation of others' experiences (Goodall, 2021). Mirror Leadership refers to an interdisciplinary approach to studying social neuroscience and mirror neuron theory, which is applied to explain how humans reproduce and internalize the other's state at the neural level (Shaikh & Waykole, 2013). The important point to note is that the mirror neuron paradigm has been met with considerable academic criticism, particularly regarding its supposed explanatory power for complex social behavior. Critics argue that the activation of mirror neurons does not necessarily indicate empathic cognition and does not fully account for the higher-order cognitive and cultural factors involved in emotion interpretation. Although Mirror Leadership is based on the general principle of affective resonance, its theoretical basis is not conditional on the literalistic or deterministic explanation of the mirror neuron phenomenon. Instead, the model fits better with modern affective neuroscience and appraisal theory than with neuroscience-based affective neuroscience, and so makes mirroring a metaphorical and functional process of emotional tuning rather than a neurobiological claim. This exposition makes the model legitimate by clarifying its distinction from outdated assumptions and emphasizing the more delicate integrative approach expressed herein. Moreover, such a conceptual framework offers a unique theoretical convergence by synthesizing Emotional Appraisal Theory (EAT) and Polyvagal Theory (PVT), thereby providing a robust neurophysiological foundation for understanding how emotional mirroring preconditions the achievement of psychological safety, social connectedness, and empathy within teams. EAT describes the cognitive mechanisms by which leaders evaluate, perceive, and interpret others' emotional states to facilitate adaptive behavioral responses, whereas PVT elucidates the underlying physiological processes that enable emotional co-regulation, calm engagement, and social attunement. These conglomerate theories spot Mirror Leadership as a naturally grounded development of emotional intelligence subsidy. This merged standpoint offers a new theoretical input by bridging emotion appraisal with neurophysiological safety procedures, thereby advancing contemporary discourse on emotionally intelligent, empathetically familiar, and interculturally sensitive leadership paradigms. The other aspects of this analysis are reflective leadership practice and emotional contagion (Petitta & Naughton, 2015). A full-scale re-conceptualization of leadership as a two-way, emotionally intelligent set of interactions rather than an emotional expansion of current models (Ybarra, Kross, & Sanchez-Burks, 2014). The Mirror Leader can change a team's behavior not only by issuing instructions or inspiring leaders, but also by tuning to a similar emotional frequency, confirming lived experiences, or providing psychological containment during periods of pressure and uncertainty (Jasubhai, 2025).

Nevertheless, it has yet to be extensively theorized; even when it is relevant, the theory of leaders as emotional mirrors remains under-theorized (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, & Fletcher, 2017). In the existing body of literature, the theme of leadership remains confined to personality, ethical alignment, or the power of strategy, without considering the complex interaction between a leader's emotional magnitude and an assembly's mental magnitude (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013). The emotional component of leadership is also studied, examining how leadership indirectly influences emotional states, often mediated by affect modulation (Gooty, Connelly, Griffith, & Gupta, 2010). The situation is particularly strained when the process is hybrid and digital, as feelings are progressively misinterpreted and increasingly subjectively interpreted. For example, in multicultural and hybrid organizations and in digitally mediated contexts, the paucity of nonverbal signals and cross-cultural variability often precipitate emotional dissonance. Leaders who demonstrate empathic mirroring and responsiveness to the affective circumstances of diverse team members bridge these socioemotional divides, cultivating intercultural cohesion, psychological security, and mutual belonging. (Bellis, Cunial, & Trabucchi, 2024; Mohase, Donald, & Israel, 2025). In a cross-cultural organizational setting, mirror leadership serves as a channel for decoding implicit emotional signals, balancing cross-cultural communication differences, and fostering an inclusive environment in which affective resonance transcends linguistic and national differences. As a result, emotional mirroring becomes not only an option for leadership but also a vital pillar for sustaining trust in globalized organizational workspaces.

Without a theory that can help explain and develop emotional mirroring and cognitive reflection, organizations will soon find themselves in a cycle of further alienation, disengagement, and burnout (Andela & Truchot, 2017). The absence of such a concept not only limits the theoretical formulation of research on leadership but also the likelihood of an organizational response to the emotional dimensions of the workforce (Ashkanasy, Härtel, & Daus, 2002). Such research is very realistic, not theoretical, and needs to be done. Emotional resonance was once an uncharacterized, unconscious skill, but today it is part of strategy (Robnett, B. (2004). The natural benefit of it, along with the life-on-unquestionably-goals, is that teams also live on empathically shared, psychologically safe teams (Sacramento et al., 2024). Over the years, researchers have shown that work environments built on empathy, trust, and relational openness lead to greater participation and creativity and can reduce turnover (Sugiarto, 2024). The ability to transcend a crisis as an emotional hero must be viewed as the most essential attribute of a leader, as psychological capital, corporate cohesion, and integrated role performance will need to be restored (Dirani et al., 2020). Due to the further digitalization of communication, specifically directed at AI-mediated processes presented to it, in the service of which new experiences of emotive fragmentation are already emerging (Valencia, 2023). In this relationship, Mirror Leadership may appear as an opportunity to revert to creating individuals who do not base themselves on policies or even on meetings, but on the breadth of building relationships with one another through all human means (Srivastava, 2005). It implies that a leader who feels, thinks, and changes without speaking can do so merely by being present. At both the practical and intercultural levels, the Mirror Leadership model can be successfully implemented through wide-ranging leadership development programs, such as global leadership training courses, reflective coaching, and culturally responsive emotional feedback systems. Through such interventions, leaders would be able to identify and interpret emotional signals across cultural

settings, manage their reactions in situational contexts, and develop psychologically safe and inclusive organizational cultures. By formalizing these practices within human resource and leadership development models, organizations can surpass emotional and cultural barriers, increasing team adaptability, engagement, and cohesion. Therefore, Mirror Leadership becomes not only a theoretical model but also an actionable, empirically validated, worldwide framework that provides a novel, transformative approach to leadership that combines emotional intelligence with intercultural competence and neurophysiological in-tuning.

The current research aims to investigate in depth some of the key questions that are presented in this newly proposed model. First, what is the real difference between emotional reflection and the effects of reflection on psychological safety and team trust? Second, how are mechanisms such as reflective cognition related to flexibility and innovation in complex workplace environments? Third, what are the fundamental differences between mirror leadership and proven models in the context of emotional alignment, relational engagement, and healing in a group of people? Moreover, finally, how can we develop and test this capacity for reflection in tomorrow's leaders so that they are prepared to deal not only with performance indicators but also with a variety of emotional ecosystems? Such questions are not just subjective; they are important and necessary. The reflector, the regulator of reality as well as empathy, can be said to be the type of leader that organizations can no longer afford, that is, it is what they need. Mirror leadership answers this call and provides a suggested conceptual framework that appeals to both the science and the spirit of contemporary leadership.

2. Literature Review

With a changing perception of leaders' roles, it is essential to investigate the theoretical bridges that describe the emotional mechanics of leaders' actions as the work environment becomes increasingly emotion-uncontrolled, hybrid, and digitally divided. To support the development of the conceptualization of Mirror Leadership, the present review will utilize two largely unexplored yet profoundly relevant theories: Emotional Appraisal Theory (EAT) and Polyvagal Theory (PVT). When used together, they possess the necessary depth to understand how leaders not only act but also emotionally appeal, moderate, and help their teams evolve in the moment. The Emotional Appraisal Theory (EAT) is an appealing analytical model for examining how individuals in the workplace attribute meaning to events, especially those involving ambiguity, stress, or interpersonal conflict. (Lazarus, 2006). The theory is grounded in Anderson's work, which assumes that individuals judge events not only rationally but also emotionally, based on their targets, preferences, and sense of control (Anderson, 2003). Embedded relationship cues in leadership can affect considerations such as voice tone, facial expressions, and emotional recognition. Emotional sensitivity in leaders helps employees view difficult, challenging conditions as manageable or mutual, alleviating psychological pressure and strengthening trust in relationships (George, 2000).

Mirror Leadership is a direct way of interacting with EAT based on changing the facts of emotions in the present moment. By portraying their distress, excitement, or doubts in an authentic and emotionally explicit way, leaders participate in the reappraisal process, which redefines team members' understanding and interpretation of stressful and ambiguous events and experiences. (Pinsky & Young, 2009). When a leader recognizes emotional exhaustion as a valid response to excessive work, rather than dismissing it, they transform the employee's experience of emotional fatigue, often seen as a sign of weakness, into a common struggle that fosters social solidarity and encourages people to persevere. Quite the contrary, emotionally blunt or performative leaders can elicit negative appraisals; they are perceived as threatening, isolated, and as invalidating their feelings. (Rice & Day, 2022). Moreover, the Emotional Appraisal Theory (EAT) and the Mirror Leadership can be considered as complementary as they anticipate the change of appraisal in real-time, not just the retrospective responses. Although EAT has always been used in the context of a stagnant, event-based situation, in the current study, it has been extended to apply to moment-to-moment leader-follower interactions, thus filling the gap of timeliness in research on appraisal. (Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2025; Porges, 2022).

Moreover, emotional reflection by a leader should also be consistent in emotional appraisal. The failure to achieve a compromise in terms of the affective exposition as a consequence of the negative or unnatural reaction of the leadership might lead to the failure to be frank about emotional experiences and, consequently, to lie about not being cynical and not being able to get emotionally involved. (Gooty et al., 2010). Mirror Leaders, on the other hand, build a shared emotional story that supports meaning and emotional identity within teams. Such effective leadership not only facilitates wellness but also makes a person more persistent and focused on tasks, particularly on emotionally ambiguous tasks, such as post-crisis recovery or strategic uncertainty (Gooty et al., 2010). However, as Emotional Appraisal Theory is relevant, the issues of leadership presence and how this presence may dynamically influence meaning-making in team interaction situations have not been addressed through current leadership theory. Mirror Leadership offers an exclusive opportunity to bridge this gap by reframing the leader as a co-critic of emotional reality. Although EAT provides knowledge about the influence of leadership on emotional interpretations, Polyvagal Theory (PVT) expands on this by grounding it in the neurobiological dynamics of safety, connection, and social engagement. Developed by Porges (2009), the PVT reveals how the vagus nerve system controls human responses to perceived danger or safety, and how even minor cues from others, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, or distance, can trigger or inhibit these responses. Leaders are essential cues of emotional safety or danger in the workplace (and a workplace is particularly high-pressure or uncertain).

There are substantial similarities between Mirror Leadership and the polyvagal theory when based on the mindful execution of affective mirroring characterized by attentive eye contact, a reassuring tone of voice, and affective body language, which prompts activation of the ventral vagal system, physiological relaxation, and neural openness and co-regulation (Tucker, 2022). The presence of such behavioral indicators facilitates the transition of team members from a state of survival, characterized by fight-or-flight responses or shutdown, to one of collaboration and creativity. On the other hand, coldness or behavioral flippancy exhibited by leaders can trigger a sympathetic or dorsal vagal response, which can lead to defensive or social withdrawal, as well as burnout, even though the leaders' intentions are allegedly positive (Porges, S. W. (2022). The use of Physical Vigilance Theory (PVT) and EAT within an integrative framework offers a multidimensional view of leadership grounded in cognitive and neurophysiological processes. Whereas EAT explains how leaders make sense of, interpret, and re-evaluate emotional events to enhance adaptive meaning-making, PVT explains how cognitive interpretations and socio-emotional cues are expressed in the autonomic nervous system, thereby affecting physiological safety, connection, and engagement. The Mirror Leadership model extends beyond a single explanatory theory to encompass both team members' conceptual evaluation steps and the effects of the bodies on real-time events, which are neurophysiologically regulated by the

PVT. This combination integrates cognition and embodiment, making leadership a psychological and scientific process that actively shapes the emotional climate in collective emotional seasons.

According to Polyvagal Theory, leadership skills are not merely associated with cognitive empathy and verbal skills; they also offer biological safety. Leaders who embody this sense of safety deliberately convey the message that individual members can be perceived, heard, and identified without hesitation or fear of criticism. The stability of feelings and emotions on their end subsequently fosters relational trust at both cognitive and neurophysiological levels (Goleman et al., 2013). Existing critically synthesized literature indicates that emotionally secure environments can further optimize learning, alleviate conflict, and improve psychological resilience (Cusack et al., 2016). Even though these facts are available, leadership theories fail to explain the impact of neurophysiological states on group processes adequately. Mirror Leadership discourses this literature deficit and fills this gap by supposing that the leaders lead the nervous system of the group. They can regulate the emotional climate with the simple fact of being there, assuming that leaders are in charge of the group's nervous system and can control the emotional climate simply through their presence (Goleman et al., 2013). Opponents argue that PVT has not been developed or used in other fields where it is not applied in clinical and treatment settings, and has shed light on processes of trauma, emotion control, and autonomic cues. As a result, it has not fully captured its relevance in leadership. The modern workplace, however, especially when in hybrid and digital state 2, tends to be defined by ongoing ambiguity, high demands of availability, and novel psychosocial stress factors, thus making a nervous-system lens notably relevant in explaining how leaders may go about managing, rather than merely cognitively appraising, embodied reactions to stress, ambiguity, change, and uncertainty. Therefore, although the scarcity of direct usage of PVT in organizational research is a valid methodological and empirical limitation of the present-day solution, the translational usefulness of PVT as a means of mapping physiological routes of safety and co-regulation provide a reduced rewarding justificatory leverage: it provides mechanistic hypotheses on how the behavior presented by the leader can influence the autonomic states of the team members, and the recent body of evidence suggesting that hybrid work performance entails higher demands and mental health concerns justifies the importance of a neurophysiological solution to leadership research and intervention (Porges, 2022; Treviño García & Christensen, 2025).

In conjunction with the perspective of emotional appraisal theory, polyvagal theory elucidates two mechanisms through which Mirror Leaders influence team performance and well-being. A remark about cognitive-emotional reframing, which is part of the emotional appraisal theory, implies that, under this theory, leaders learn to direct the behavioral manifestations of the process. In contrast, polyvagal theory can be used to explain physiological co-regulation, which is a result of the process being mirrored emotionally. Together, these leaders provide both emotional containment during periods of volatility and psychological nourishment when feeling fatigued, both of which are rapidly growing needs in the modern workplace. Recent empirical evidence also supports the applicability of both theories in the organizational context. For example, Zeleke, Guyo, & Moronge (2025) show the impact of leaders' beliefs on team emotions, and Mehler et al. (2024) meta-analyze evidence on the importance of training emotional competencies in the workplace. (Galvin, Badura, LePine, & LePine, 2024; Javalagi, Newman, & Li, 2024). All those theoretical backdrops provide interdisciplinary sustenance that dwellings Mirror Leadership in an exact and precise, unavoidable way to respond to the world of work, which is increasingly characterized by emotional rather than operational challenges. To provide intercultural grounding, it should be accepted that emotional appraisal and nervous system processes are culturally situated, given that criteria for emotional expression, co-regulation behaviors, and indicators of trust vary significantly across cultures. Therefore, the Mirror Leadership also implies that mirroring in the cultural responsiveness model requires the leader to adapt their emotional and physiological sensitivity to situation-specific expressiveness norms, nonverbal expressiveness norms, and power-distance norms. This can help leaders send and receive emotional responses in a way that is authentically understood across a broad spectrum of cultural backgrounds, thus increasing inclusivity, psychological safety, and mutual understanding. The intercultural aspect, therefore, positions the universal aspect of the framework, as Mirror Leadership can go beyond monocultural orientations and clearly meet the demands of multicultural and geographically dispersed teams present in the modern, interconnected world of organizations.

2.1. Mirror Leadership in Compensation to Transformational, Authentic, and Resonant Leadership: An Intercultural Communication Perspective

Although transformational, authentic, and resonant theories of leadership have been of considerable importance in developing current explanations of leader-follower relations, they provide insufficient explanatory content regarding the neurophysiological and intercultural processes that are central to Mirror Leadership. Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiration, vision, and individual consideration, but theorizes influence as a process of cognition and motivation rather than as an embodied, moment-to-moment emotional interaction. We do not find in models explaining how leaders activate meaning-making that the influence of physiological co-regulation, vagal signalling, or real-time affective mirroring on follower states in hybrid or culturally diverse settings is addressed. True leadership focuses on self-awareness, moral values, and transparency in relationships. However, it presupposes that the similarity of values within and beyond behaviour is universally perceived and understood across cultures. Mirror Leadership is a departure from this assumption, incorporating intercultural communication theory, especially the high and low context of communication theory of Hall, and the Face-Negotiation Theory developed by Ting-Toomey, to hypothesize that emotional mirroring, validation, and physiological cues are encoded and decoded differently within cultural scripts. As a result, Mirror Leadership offers culturally relativistic accounts of the mechanisms of attunement, explaining the variation in the relativity of emotional expressions across power-distance norms, expressiveness orientations, and implicit communication styles.

Resonant leadership, which is emotionally intelligent and relational, is closest to Mirror Leadership in spirit, but it also operates within the psychological competence system rather than the biological mechanism system. Resonant leaders generate harmony through emotional attunement, but the theory does not describe the neurophysiological mechanisms underlying it, at least not the mobilization of the ventral vagal system, autonomic co-regulation, or somatic expressive patterns that allow resonance to take place. Mirror Leadership is an extension of resonant leadership, which defines the mechanistic relationship among emotional synchrony, physiological safety, and cross-cultural meaning-making. Combined with intercultural communication scholarship, Mirror Leadership is thus a unique contribution: the concept of leadership is oriented toward a biocultural process in which emotional evaluations and physiological conditions are co-regulated through culturally mediated cues. This multidisciplinary synthesis explains why emotional disorientation, mental danger, or disconnection often occur in hybrid or multicultural groups, and why leaders must flex their reflective and mirroring behaviours to meet culturally specific

standards of emotional expression, interpersonal harmony, and face preservation. Mirror Leadership is therefore a contribution to the field by connecting neuroscience, emotion theory, and intercultural communication, offering a model that can explain leadership effectiveness in digitally mediated, globally distributed settings. Although it has been acknowledged that a transformational approach is inadequate for explaining real-time emotional processes, the transactional approach to leadership should be explicitly considered as its antithesis. Transactional leadership is based on contingent reward, observation, and corrective action. The concept of leadership is an exchange process controlled by rational performance expectations, not by emotional co-regulation. The inclusion of this view shows that pitting instrumental, compliance-based models against Mirror Leadership, which views influence as embodied, affective, and neurophysiologically based. By comparing these paradigms, I can more effectively address the scope of leadership theory and show how Mirror Leadership fills the gaps left by relational and exchange-based theories.

3. Methodology

This research study employs a conceptual research methodology to gain a theoretical understanding of the emergent phenomenon of Mirror Leadership, synthesizing interdisciplinary sources from organizational behavior, social neuroscience, leadership psychology, and affective science. The goal is to create a construct-based framework that can be substantiated by propositions, to understand how mirror leadership may be applied as an emotional control and interpersonal influence process within complex, high-demanding organizational contexts. Since the nature of Mirror Leadership as a construct remains underexplored in the existing body of empirical research, the study does not present experimental hypotheses; instead, it presents a hypothetic conceptual framework on which subsequent empirical research may be developed, and leadership fostered. Since the domain is still relatively underdeveloped, a narrative literature review design would be particularly suitable for creating original conceptual models (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). The approach enables the synthesis of empirical findings and theoretical insights across several fields in which emotional mirroring, reflective leadership, and psychological safety have been investigated separately, but not integrated into a unified school of thought on leadership. Mirror Leadership is a multidimensional construct born of psychology, neurobiology, leadership theory, and organizational design; integrating these dimensions provides a more comprehensive understanding of its essence and implications.

A systematic literature search was conducted across various academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, APA PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. The literature search was conducted based on works published between 2000 and 2025, allowing for the inclusion of both earlier theories and the latest studies. The search strings included Boolean operators, and searches included emotional mirroring and leadership, reflective practice and leader behavior, emotional contagion in organizations, mirror neurons and social regulation, psychological safety and leadership, and affective neuroscience and team trust. A peer-reviewed systematic search has been conducted to aggregate a comprehensive corpus of articles from organizational psychology, leadership, neuroscience, human resources, and management. The publications were selected to include only strictly peer-reviewed publications written in English. Scientists discarded dissertations, preprints, and those ends that lacked robust theoretical backing to maintain the conceptual quality. To strengthen methodological transparency, the conceptual synthesis followed a structured four-step process consisting of (1) applying inclusion criteria to screen theoretically substantive sources, (2) conducting multi-level coding using NVivo, (3) merging overlapping concepts into higher-order themes, and (4) determining conceptual saturation. Inclusion criteria required that studies contribute to either the emotional or the neurophysiological mechanisms of leadership or to intercultural affective processes. NVivo supported systematic coding by generating node structures, mapping co-occurrence patterns, and validating theme stability. Conceptual saturation was reached when additional literature no longer introduced new constructs. For example, instances of attunement, co-regulation, and synchrony were repeatedly identified across neuroscience and leadership studies and merged into a unified theme of *embodied emotional alignment*. A summary of this process is presented in **Figure 1**, which outlines the search, coding logic, and synthesis flow. The literature studied was later categorized into four thematic clusters:

Figure 1: Literature Search and Thematic Synthesis Flowchart

1. *Emotional and Social Neuroscience Leadership (e.g., mirror neurons, affective synchrony).*

2. *Reflective and Emotionally Intelligent Leadership (e.g., self-awareness, attuned listening, empathy, etc.).*

3. *Psychological Safety and Trust Building (e.g., emotional validation, co-regulation, leader affect).*

4. New Emotional Theories used on Leadership (e.g., Emotional Appraisal Theory, Polyvagal Theory).

This figure presents a sequential overview of the methodological process used in this conceptual study. It outlines: (1) the systematic identification and screening of literature; (2) the application of inclusion criteria to refine relevant sources; (3) NVivo-assisted coding at three levels, conceptual relevance, relational coding, and integrative synthesis; (4) the merging of overlapping constructs into higher-order theoretical domains; and (5) the determination of conceptual saturation and the final development of theoretical propositions. The figure illustrates how interdisciplinary evidence from neuroscience, leadership studies, psychology, and intercultural communication was synthesized into a coherent conceptual framework.

An inter-study comparison also assessed the conceptual density and alignment with emotion-mirroring mechanisms of theoretical constructs, as well as each study's contribution to the leadership outcome. Authors would identify any discrepancies in the coding process and address them systematically by repeatedly re-examining the construct definitions and theme boundaries. The entire synthesis process was grounded on the integrative review framework offered by Gilson and Goldberg (2015), where each step (problem identification, literature integration, construct

development, and propositional logic) is sequentially prioritized, thus creating a clear and auditable connection between the reviewed literature and the developed theoretical propositions (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015). All clusters of assessments were conducted to measure the degree of similarity between the theoretical insights and the conceptual overlap, and to identify areas of research that might be of concern. These studies led to the inclusion of Emotional Appraisal Theory (Lazarus, 1991) and Polyvagal Theory (Porges, 2009) within the Mirror Leadership framework. Emotional Appraisal Theory explains how leaders simultaneously construct emotional meanings through attunement and validation, and Polyvagal Theory offers a physiological account of emotional safety and presence in interpersonal interactions. By focusing on real-time, embodied, and bidirectional emotional processes, these theories examine levels that have been largely disregarded in traditional corporate leadership frameworks.

Figure 1 shows the literature search and selection procedure, a structured, multi-stage methodology aimed at ensuring methodological rigor and transparency. The first-stage search, conducted in leading academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, JSTOR, and Google Scholar, identified 472 records related to the focus of leadership and emotion. After screening titles and abstracts, 310 studies remained due to conceptual relevance. The repetitive entries, non-peer-reviewed papers, and low-quality studies were later filtered out, leaving a clear pool of 218 sources. The 128 articles were grouped into four high-level clusters based on the main theoretical orientations of the work, using thematic clustering and conceptual coding. To make sure that the best studies have been included and those in focus are the recent ones, new articles published in 2023-2025 of: Marstand et al. (2025), Froese et al. (2025), Muss et al. (2025) were added later, and the final corpus of 142 peer-reviewed articles was formed. This methodical and iterative procedure promotes transparency, traceability, and replicability of research analyses and thus satisfies the scholarly requirement of methodological explicitness in theoretical review studies.

The conceptual development methodology was followed as set out by Gilson and Goldberg (2015), including the identification of the problem, integration of the literature, development of constructs, and propositional logic. Mirror Leadership has been defined and charted as self-conscious, emotionally motivating, reflective, conscious, and physiologically secure. The authors argue that the elements extend the causal intermediates between Mirror Leadership practice and employee outcomes, which comprise psychological safety, trust, creativity, and post-crisis resilience. Conceptual methodologies allow thorough integration at a theoretical level but, by definition, do not have empirical validation. This weakness is simply recognized: conclusions remain theoretical until they are subjected to a mixed-methods, longitudinal, or experimental design. However, conceptual enquiry is critical in young sciences such as Mirror Leadership, where structures must come before measurement. To promote conceptual rigor, the inclusion criteria were grounded on three criteria: (1) the theoretical novelty of sources working in either emotional or neurobiological leadership domains; (2) peer-reviewed sources of high impact (Q1, ABDC-A); and (3) empirical demonstrations of links between leadership emotion, trust, or team dynamics. The results of the synthesis were directly coded into propositional statements, which form the basis of the proposed Mirror Leadership model. However, the absence of quantitative testing in the current study still provides a solid theoretical foundation for mixed-methods studies, experimental research, and longitudinal field research. It presents a multidimensional framework, Mirror Leadership, to spur empirical studies that examine whether the framework applies across various industries, organizational structures, and cultures. The conceptual approach provides a common language between the conventionally distinct domains of leadership theory, neuroscience, and psychology that is so needed in the age of organizational complexity, when the required role of leadership involves more than carrying out the schedules of tasks, but also the emotional management, restorative relationship, and the embodied building of trust.

4.   Data Analysis & Results

The paper combines the Mirror Leadership concept with the Emotional Appraisal Theory (EAT) and the Polyvagal Theory (PVT) to develop a biological and psychologically informed account of how leaders can shape emotional climates and physiological states, as well as post-response emotions, in modern, highly condensed work environments, which are frequently hybrid ones. Based on recent developments in neuropsychological studies, affective organizational study, as well as the study of digital-age leadership, the data analysis synthesizes insights from the four thematic clusters identified earlier to generate six simplified and integrative propositions that directly address the theoretical gaps identified in the introduction—specifically the lack of real-time emotional interaction, intercultural adaptation, and neuro-emotional mechanisms in leadership theory.

4.1. Mirror Leadership as an Emotional Co-Regulator

Mirror Leadership as an Emotional Co-Regulator: Leadership is approached as an embodied act, in which leaders' calm, predictable responses to emotional stimuli activate the ventral vagal system in others, guided by Polyvagal Theory. This impact is also neurobiologically established, demonstrating that emotional mirroring calms and induces decreased endocrinological and circulatory levels of stress-related hormones, including cortisol, and improves markers of endocrinological risk, such as a greater heart-rate range. (Depue & Lenzenweger, 2006). Safety in this type of regulation is performed somatically, not just cognitively, and genuine trust can develop, allowing genuine emotional interactions to take place. (Williams, 2007).

Proposition 1: Attuned leaders with affective displays matched to distress or enthusiasm, in emotionally felt leaders, trigger physiological co-regulation in teams, thereby boosting psychological safety, decreasing heightened responses, and enhancing trust.

4.2. Mirror Leadership and Meaning-Making through Reappraisal

Emotional Appraisal Theory holds that emotions arise from interactions between situational events and personal interpretations. In experienced or unknown/stressful situations, it is essential and beneficial to engage in an emotional reappraisal; hence the significance of Mirror Leaders in validating distress and reframing it as a challenge to be taken on rather than faced as a threat. (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003). These emotional meaning-building activities enhance the integrity of a story, foster mutual strength, and enable common cognitive restructuring that transforms a crisis into a growth and developmental opportunity. As a result, leaders would be able to act as storytellers, thus allowing teams to adapt anxiety-filled stories into empowerment stories of transformative adaptation (Middleton et al., 2015).

Proposition 2: Mirror Leadership enables the joint reconstruction of emotions in situations of uncertainty or pressure, which ultimately leads to stronger team coherence and resilience, and, in the end, to a sense of purpose.

4.3. Mirror Leadership and Psychological Security

Psychological safety, a perception that one is not scared of rejection or humiliation in being able to express his or her thoughts freely, has come out as a spark of innovation and collaboration. This is achieved by Mirror Leaders through a combination of synchronous body language, active listening, and equal pitch and tone to convey emotional safety (Edmondson, 2018). These unofficial signals activate the brain's social engagement mechanism, provoke trust responses, and enhance a group's coherence. Mirroring is particularly crucial in an online or hybrid environment, where emotional sensitivity might be reduced, as it enhances openness, reduces the risk of interpersonal conflict, and builds the confidence to be creative (Rajpurohit, 2025).

Proposition 3: Mirror Leaders found in cross-time-zone settings can promote psychological safety through deeply emotional behaviors and nonverbal communication, thereby fostering openness, innovation, and trust.

4.4. Mirror Leadership and Emotional Containment in Crisis Recovery

In such scenarios, as emotional intensity increases, organizational destabilization (e.g., layoffs and rapid change), and social upheaval occur, a team leader should remain calm without losing control of the process. Emotional containment refers to the leader's capacity to demonstrate psychological balance while also providing a platform to share pain. Polygonal Variable Theory (PVT) is based on the idea that these leaders control their followers' nervous systems through constant social referencing and the presence of a consistent, caring leader (Bandura, 1999). In this case, Mirror Leaders are stable and responsive through empathy, thereby ensuring that a certain facet of intense fragmentation is eradicated, while the teams are channeled into coherent behaviors that, in turn, restore continuity in feelings. They also produce a stabilizing effect leading to post-traumatic growth; they act, in effect, as emotional anchors, facilitating the stabilization of collective care.

Proposition 4: A Mirror Leader is a highly significant emotional container during crises or when uncertainties emerge, leading to reduced fragmentation and greater resilience through physiological and psychological destabilization.

4.5. Mirror Leadership as a Bridge for Relational Repair

Diversification in work environments and work pressure are bound to cause disputes, a lack of mutual understanding, and a breakdown of emotional bonds between people in such environments. Mirror Leaders offer a bridge to relational restoration because they do not judge or react defensively; instead, they carefully reflect on disturbing expressions such as anger, disappointment, or distrust. Such a responsive and reflective practice helps team members feel heard, seen, and emotionally reconnected. (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). Clear neuroscientific evidence suggests that a positive, mindful, and reflective state of mind, aided by compassionate non-reactivity, counterbalances adverse effects and heals a fractured, motor cord-like relationship (Žvelc & Žvelc, 2021). This way, the leaders support interpersonal curing, reinforcing emotional relationships and psychological synchronization within damaged bonds.

Proposition 5: Mirror Leadership re-establishes the relationship by repairing emotional alignment and validation, and, as a result, fosters greater trust and stronger collaboration, leading to greater connectivity.

4.6. Mirror Leadership and Emotional Intelligence Diffusion

As a cultural process and an emotional phenomenon, leadership is an unconscious learning process in which the high-status behavior of one person is copied by their peers. Emotional intelligence (EI) takes root in a team when team leaders maintain emotional consistency and sufficient emotional control and understand their staff. (Abraham, 1999). As the process unfolds, this EI diffusion leads to a high level of interpersonal sensitivity, thoughtful decision-making, and emotionally literate teamwork (Kunnanatt, 2008). Such behaviors are reflected and not trained. This diffusion of EI functions, both preventive and restorative, occurs in organizations facing burnout, communication issues, or fragmented cultures (Cornelsen, 2025).

Proposition 6: Mirror Leaders develop organizational emotional intelligence through their reflective behaviors, building an organizational culture of empathic leadership, self-control, and transparent communication norms.

Table 1 presents six theoretically tested propositions that can be used to expand the Mirror Leadership framework by incorporating Emotional Appraisal Theory (EAT) and Polyvagal Theory (PVT) in intercultural leadership contexts. Each proposition outlines a specific emotional mechanism, the theory behind it, the intercultural moderator, its expected consequence, and its managerial inference. According to P1, emotional co-regulation, based on PVT, differs between collectivist and individualist cultures and thereby affects the level of physiological and emotional safety within teams; the leader must be trained to be sensitive to intercultural affective signals to ensure calm interaction. Basing arguments on EAT, P2 focuses on meaning-making via reappraisal that is moderated by a high/low-context style of communication that results in shared resilience and a consistent telling of team stories, especially in times of crisis, where culturally mediated emotional narratives support collective coping. P3 integrates PVT and EAT and suggests that differences in power distance influence psychological safety, whereas reflective listening and nonverbal synchronization foster trust in hybrid and cross-cultural meetings. P4, which is PVT-based, emphasizes emotional containment as an aspect of cultural rules for displaying emotions,

implying that leaders need to develop intercultural empathy and containment competencies to help a team recover from stress. P5 synthesizes Mirror Leadership Theory and EAT to exemplify relational repair in the context of collectivist and individualist reconciliation styles, with a focus on culturally sensitive conflict resolution to restore trust and cooperative relationships. Lastly, P6, which is based on Social Learning Theory and PVT, emphasizes that cultural learning orientation mediates the transmission of emotional intelligence within a team, meaning that leader modelling could be one way of developing empathy and emotional literacy based on diversity and inclusion programmes. All in all, the propositions jointly illustrate that neurophysiological processes of emotional integration, with cultural moderators, determine the effectiveness of leadership in global, hybrid, and multicultural settings.

Table 1: Summary of Theoretical Propositions, Intercultural Moderators, and Managerial Implications

Proposition	Underlying Theory	Intercultural Moderator	Expected Outcome	Managerial Implication
P1 – Emotional Co-Regulation	Polyvagal Theory	Collectivist vs. Individualist cultures	Physiological and emotional safety	Train leaders in intercultural affective cues for calm engagement
P2 – Meaning-Making through Reappraisal	Emotional Appraisal Theory	High-context vs. Low-context communication	Shared resilience and narrative coherence	Use culture-adapted emotional storytelling during crises
P3– Psychological Safety	PVT + EAT integration	Power-distance variations	Team openness and trust	Implement reflective listening and nonverbal synchronization in hybrid meetings
P4 – Emotional Containment	Polyvagal Theory	Cultural emotion-display rules	Reduced fragmentation and team recovery	Coach leaders in intercultural empathy and containment techniques
P5 – Relational Repair	Mirror Leadership Theory + EAT	Collectivist vs. Individualist reconciliation styles	Restored trust and collaboration	Facilitate culturally sensitive conflict repair practices
P6 – Emotional Intelligence Diffusion	Social Learning Theory + PVT	Cultural learning orientation	Diffused empathy and emotional literacy	Integrate leader modeling into diversity and inclusion programs

Source: by the author

To visually consolidate the theoretical architecture of the Mirror Leadership framework, Figure 2 presents an integrated conceptual model illustrating how Emotional Appraisal Theory (EAT) and Polyvagal Theory (PVT) jointly shape leaders' emotional mirroring, co-regulation, and reflective meaning-making. The model also incorporates key cross-cultural moderators, such as power distance, communication context, expressiveness norms, and reconciliation styles, that influence how mirroring signals are interpreted across diverse cultural environments. The visual framework positions Mirror Leadership as a biocultural process in which neurophysiological mechanisms interact with culturally embedded communication patterns to predict outcomes, including psychological safety, relational trust, resilience, and the diffusion of emotional intelligence.

**Figure 2:** Conceptual Model of Mirror Leadership with Cross-Cultural Moderators.

This model visually integrates the core theoretical mechanisms of Mirror Leadership. Emotional Appraisal Theory (EAT) informs leaders' meaning-making and emotional reframing processes, while Polyvagal Theory (PVT) explains physiological co-regulation and neurobiological safety cues. Cross-cultural moderators—communication context, power distance, expressiveness norms, and reconciliation styles—shape how emotional mirroring is interpreted across cultures. These interacting mechanisms produce key outcomes, including psychological safety, relational repair, resilience, and the diffusion of emotional intelligence.

4.7. Practical Applicability of the Theoretical Model

The proposed framework (Figure 1) is expected to offer an operational-psychological paradigm that will convert the advanced leadership theory into practice when operating in the high-stakes professional contexts. Based on Mirror Leadership, Polyvagal Theory (PVT), and Emotional Appraisal Theory (EAT), the model can provide a multidisciplinary viewpoint which can improve emotional resilience, psychological safety, and organizational trust, which are vital in the face of uncertainty, emotional instability, and interpersonal failure situations. It can be applied to executives in companies, human resource leaders, administrators in institutions of post-secondary learning, officers in the military, professionals and managers in the medical field, and in highly task-oriented and high-pressure external conditions. The model is necessary since it not only considers leadership as a mental and strategic need, but it also considers leadership as a neuro-emotional procedure that manages a team's safety, retention, and culture by co-regulating affect and relationship mirroring.

4.8. Framing Mirror Leadership as a Human-Centered Regulatory Resource

Transactional leadership, which focuses on results related to tasks, is the opposite of Mirror Leadership, which can be regarded as a dynamic human resource that determines affective climates. The mirroring behaviors provided by PVT alignment practices, such as tonal modulation, facial attunement, and coordinated posture, enable leaders to strengthen the autonomic system of team members, particularly their ventral vagal complex. The effect of this support is to create a baseline of hazard tolerance, reverse sympathetic overdrive, and enhance specific focus and executive functioning in response to pressure to perform. The potential impacts of emotional co-regulation in healthcare, the field considered in this example, include increased diagnostic accuracy among co-regulated nurses and physicians, decreased burnout, and a greater capacity for emotional buffering among co-regulated staff members in clinical settings where patients are experiencing distress. Similarly, on high-risk tasks such as aviation, defense, and crisis management operations, a calm and focused leader who emulates the behavior of other team members serves as an effective anchor for team cohesion under pressure. The given improves the positioning of Mirror Leadership as a non-technological, embodied form of regulation for measuring sustainable performance under emotional and physical pressure.
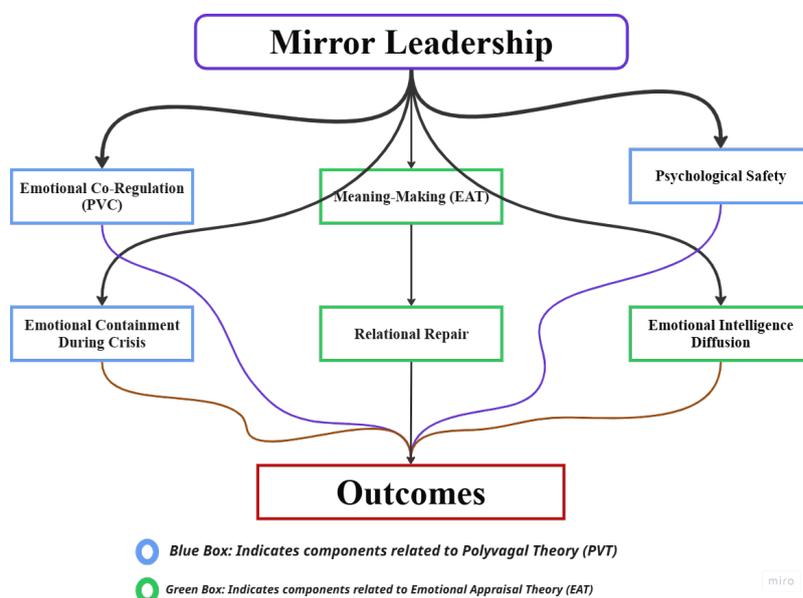
Figure 3: Mirror Leadership with Polyvagal Theory (PVT) and Emotional Appraisal Theory (EAT).

4.9. Emotional Reappraisal as a Meaning-Making Mechanism

Using Emotional Appraisal Theory, the model emphasizes the leader's role in bringing emotionally significant events to the forefront. Instead of allowing fear, disappointment, and frustration to exist in an unexpressed form, the Mirror Leaders' process team helps individuals express their emotions so that they become validated and mirrored in a manner that empirically reframes the emotional state of perceiving a given threat as one of challenge, rather than failure, as a positive step towards development. This process converts disempowered team narratives into empowered ones. The attributes of resilience and purpose orientation are evident among leaders who engage in mutual reappraisal within a startup ecosystem, where failure rates are high, and no one knows the future. Such leadership would be helpful in a learning situation where failure in exams or decline in performance could be reframed as a learning opportunity, rather than an embarrassment. The role plays a critical role in the presence of a multicultural or neurodiversity community, low perceived emotions, or culturally colored emotions. Mirror Leaders bring coherence and psychological wholeness to an emotionally divided climate through a common emotional meaning-making.

4.10. Psychological Safety through Attunement and Synchrony

Not only is psychological safety related to innovation and voice behavior, but it is also effective. The model assumes that it is possible to operate safely through small and largely unconscious processes, such as sensitive listening, micro-expressions of concern, and nonverbal emotional reflection, which are theorized to be seen in Mirror Leaders. Mirror-informed leadership, achieved by converting these nonverbal signals into voice tone, digital responsiveness, emojis, and functionalized check-ins, is what companies using hybrid teams worldwide have discovered to boost digital disconnection and improve engagement in virtual and hybrid work environments. In mixed-sex groups, emotionally intelligent mirroring also works to counteract the impact of stereotype threat by legitimizing deviant emotional displays. Hierarchical leadership can be transformed into lateral

emotional bonding by practicing the synchronization of verbal and nonverbal affective cues that elicits a sense of awe, predictive of high trust and performance.

4.11. Containment of Emotional Overload in Crisis Contexts

Psychological safety, the long-term identified underlying psychological factor of innovative action and vocal participation, is equally disassembled affectively as cognitively. This model argues that safety can be operationalized by minor, often unconscious, methods, including attuned listening, micro-expressions of care, and nonverbal emotional mirroring, as employed by Mirror Leadership. With virtual and hybrid working environments, in which physical proximity is replaced by virtual presence, such nonverbal displays need to be interpreted in terms of voice tonality, digital reactivity, emojis, and formal check-ins. Commands based on such mirror principles enable organizations that go global with hybrid working teams to reduce online detachment and heighten interaction. Emotionally intelligent mirroring also helps eliminate stereotype threat in gender-diverse teams, as it does by approving differing emotional displays. The synchrony-based practice of aligning verbal and nonverbal affective cues transforms hierarchical leadership into emotional bonding perpendicular to the leaders, which is a predictor of high levels of trust and performance.

4.12. Relational Repair and Affective Trust Restoration

The intrapersonal lapses caused by being left out, misunderstanding, or feeling wrong require a system that is outside the standard system of apologizing or adjusting procedures. Mirror Leaders, an unexplored yet promising treatment option, are implemented to repair the effects by using the body of the leader to mirror affective pain, affective shame, or affective mistrust. By repeating the emotional hurt of a subordinate through facial recapturing, persistent or calculated silence, and outright recognition of the emotional hurt by a superior, a person sends a message that there is psychological proximity and recognition. This type of repair is particularly effective in multicultural or matrix-based organizations where power disparities and cultural values hinder the open display of emotions. In family businesses, as well as in cross-cultural work teams and post-conflict regions, relational repair through affective mirroring restores organizational systems of attachment, fostering a sense of belonging and cooperativeness. In addition, it also helps to alleviate the effect of emotional disintegration, which is a known precursor of attrition, absenteeism, and passive-aggressive withdrawal.

4.13. Diffuse Emotional Intelligence through Leader Modeling

Instead of viewing emotional intelligence (EI) as an unchanging property or a predetermined measure of performance, the Mirror Leadership framework explains its development through social learning and mimetic activities. By a steady display of resonant presence, momentary pauses, and a naming of feelings, one can inoculate others with these micro-behaviors, which are analogous to the spread of language or gesture. A positive diffusion of empathy, emotional terms, and control norms, together with emotional contagion when positive and in control. These emotionally infused conditions within academic institutions, business corporations, and sports organizations reduce aggression, elevate peer pressure, and act as a morale booster. In the long term, Mirror Leaders contributed to creating an emotional literacy culture that ultimately manifests in conflict prevention, onboarding, and retention.

5. Discussion

Mirror Leadership has undergone a dramatic change in its studies due to the theories of Emotional Appraisal and Polyvagal regulation. The emotional involvement in Mirror Leadership is the center of power, rather than the concept of leadership as a strategy of thinking or relationship care. One is Leadership in regulating emotion: Mirror Leadership mobilizes the archaic concepts of emotional labor to bring to the fore neurobiological components of presence and mirroring. The frequency of the empathetic mirroring of leaders is directly related, in the first place, to regulating the physiological arousal of the team according to Polyvagal Theory. (Porges & Furman, 2011). This is particularly useful in scenarios of high stress and emotional instability, such as emergency healthcare, crisis management, and digital workspaces, where team members tend to oscillate between hyper-vigilance and emotional deactivation. (Mansoor, I. (2025). Mirror Leadership lowers cortisol levels and increases heart rate variability, creating a biomarker of emotional control and psychological flexibility. (Miller-Fox, 2022). Second, Emotional sense-making with the help of Mirror Leadership: The concept concerns the common sense of invalid emotions in the workplace. The Emotional Appraisal Theory assumes that not only does the external event matter in the emotional response, but also the meaning that the event has been attributed to (Moors, Ellsworth, Scherer, & Frijda, 2013). Reflecting on and reinterpreting spontaneous emotional displays can lead to emotional reframing, in which anxiety is converted into motivation and ambiguity into curiosity, when leaders engage in the co-construction of meaning by reflecting on and redefining emotional signals on an ongoing basis (Kempster, Iszatt-White, & Brown, 2019). As co-appraisers of team reality, Mirror Leaders in this role act and encourage cognitive-emotional coherence, which augments collective resilience. Under post-pandemic restoration conditions, the phenomenon of Mirror Leadership, namely leaders' ability to empathize with their subordinates' exhaustion and psychological fatigue, has been shown to foster a sense of shared struggle that further enhances morale and engagement. (Wirtz, Rigotti, Otto, & Loeb, 2017).

Third, the construct of psychological safety has most often been explored through behavioral or structural processes, which this approach redefines as an emotional and neurophysiological state created collaboratively through subtle nonverbal cues (Jasubhai, S. (2025). Such redefinition induces a diversion in interest in technical policies regarding embodied leadership presence. Mirror Leaders promote safety by not relying on safety statements or regular check-ins; instead, they adjust micro-behaviors, such as aligning posture, adjusting voice tone, or maintaining extended eye contact, thereby triggering the brain's social engagement system (Studer, 2019). These emotional cues are essential in the context of hybrid and remote work, when people cannot rely on visual cues much or when they are misleading. Fourth, emotional containment is no exception; merely conceiving that emotional containment is equivalent to leadership, Mirror Leadership separates the two key differences between containment and suppression. Containment refers to the capacity to contain others' emotional distress before making impulsive or defensive responses, and it has become of great value in areas where affective instability is unavoidable, such as social services, emotional treatment, education, and political activism. Emotional angst can be absorbed and integrated into adaptive momentum, as leaders remain in a state of equanimity when providing authentic emotional validation (Ginsberg, 2020). Fifth, in HR conflict management literature, relational repair, as indicated in several sources, is advanced by Mirror Leadership, which proposes introducing affective resonance as a mechanism of reparation (Campbell, 2017). Leaders who reflect negative

feelings without criticizing or reflecting them, mirroring them with a gesture of disappointment, confusion, or anger, evoke an embodied sense of being understood. This reconstitutes emotional alignment and psychological contract in broken, multi-culturally diverse teams that are a result of cultural misunderstandings, role ambiguity, or earlier trauma (Beatty, 2013). Ultimately, Mirror Leadership has paved the way for a new approach to disseminating emotional intelligence (EI) within organizations. However, unlike a top-down training program or a workshop conducted by another organization, Mirror Leaders can use the process of osmosis to teach EI. Their presence, emotional literacy, and reflective response are incorporated into the model of behavior; thus, this model serves as an example for others (Hesselbein & Shrader, 2008). This establishes a new long-term culture where empathy, emotional openness, and relational deftness are the norms of an organization, not extraordinary practices. This diffusion also prevents miscommunication among high-turnover occupations or multicultural groups, promotes psychological assimilation, and also contributes to retention (Luthans, 2002). A critical consideration concerns the risk of leader overload. Although Mirror Leadership emphasizes presence, attunement, and emotional co-regulation, these expectations may unintentionally reproduce the burden already criticized in transformational and relational models, where leaders are idealized as perpetual sources of inspiration and emotional strength. The model must therefore be understood not as a call for unlimited emotional labor, but as a framework that encourages leaders to cultivate sustainable, bounded emotional engagement. Recognizing one's limits, distributing emotional responsibility across teams, and establishing organizational structures that buffer leaders from excessive affective demands are essential safeguards. Without such boundaries, the model risks generating unrealistic expectations or emotional overextension.

In theory, when the Emotional Appraisal Theory and Polyvagal Theory of the mechanism of leadership meet in synthesis, the convergence allows one to say that the convergence opens the possibility to grasp what leadership is all about, psychologically and physiologically. It supports the idea that charm and other skills can influence altered actions and vice versa, as well as the idea that collaboration and feelings perception can also serve as informers. (Porges, 2022). These results demonstrate that the increased scholarly and practical literature provokes scholars and practitioners to re-strategize the way they educate leaders and consider the embodied practices, nervous system literacy, and emotional co-authorship. Simply put, Mirror Leadership is a drastic but proven method for leadership changes. It brushes against the less appreciated dynamics of the strong emotion processes that throb with trust, creativity, resilience, and healing at the team level. It is not a rabbit-in-the-grass model; especially not in post-crisis, high-pressure, and digital conditions, leaders are frequency-matched control, redefinition, and restoration agents. It is hoped that these assertions will be empirically supported by neurobiological, qualitative, and longitudinal studies in the future. However, even though constructed at the level of principle alone, the Mirror Leadership is a curious paradigm and could revolutionize the emotional foundation of contemporary leadership practice.

5.1. Discussion Aligned with Theoretical Propositions

Proposition 1 – Emotional Co-Regulation

Mirror Leadership's first proposition clarifies that attuned leaders shape followers' physiology through co-regulation, thereby expanding traditional leadership theory by linking trust formation to vagal activation and emotional synchrony. Managerially, this highlights the need for leaders to train in emotional pacing, somatic awareness, and nonverbal modulation, especially in hybrid contexts where signals are easily lost. Future empirical validation may involve physiological markers, such as heart rate variability or synchrony indices, in dyadic or team interactions to confirm the co-regulatory effects proposed.

Proposition 2 – Meaning-Making Through Reappraisal

The second proposition positions leaders as co-appraisers who collaboratively reinterpret emotionally charged situations, contributing to a shared sense of purpose and resilience. This advances appraisal theory by emphasizing collective meaning-making rather than individual evaluation. Practically, organizations can adopt structured reflection practices, crisis debriefing routines, and narrative framing techniques. Empirical pathways include vignette experiments and linguistic analysis of team communication to examine how leader reframing shapes emotional interpretations.

Proposition 3 – Psychological Safety Through Attunement

This proposition reframes psychological safety as an embodied relational state generated through micro-signals such as tone, pacing, and eye contact, offering a neurophysiological explanation beyond existing behavioural models. For practitioners, the implication is the need for leader development that strengthens digital and physical attunement skills. Psychological safety can be empirically tested using longitudinal team studies and behavioural coding of leader–follower synchrony in both virtual and in-person environments.

Proposition 4 – Emotional Containment in Crisis

The fourth proposition emphasizes the leader's role as an emotional container, distinguishing containment from emotional suppression. Theoretically, this extends crisis leadership research by highlighting autonomic stabilization processes. Managerially, crisis-response training should incorporate containment techniques—calm presence, emotional validation, and deliberate de-escalation. Future research may use crisis simulations, cortisol testing, and diary studies to measure how containment behaviors influence emotional recovery.

Proposition 5 – Relational Repair and Trust Restoration

This proposition contributes a mechanism for relational repair based on affective mirroring rather than cognitive negotiation. Leaders who reflect emotion non-defensively facilitate psychological reconnection, especially in culturally diverse settings where norms for emotional expression differ. Practically, relational coaching should incorporate culturally sensitive mirroring strategies. Empirical work can include observational coding of repair conversations and cross-cultural experiments comparing affective alignment in conflict scenarios.

Proposition 6 – Emotional Intelligence Diffusion Through Modelling

The sixth proposition reframes EI as a socially transmitted capability rather than a static trait, extending social learning theory with neuro-emotional components. Managerially, this suggests that EI development relies more on leader modelling than on formal training. Empirical validation may include social network analysis to track EI diffusion patterns and longitudinal studies examining how leader behavior shapes collective emotional norms. Finally, while the conceptual enthusiasm surrounding

Mirror Leadership reflects the promise of integrating neuroscience and intercultural theory, a rigorous academic posture requires maintaining critical distance from the model. The present paper acknowledges both its conceptual strengths and its limitations, including the risks of over-idealization, cultural misinterpretation, and emotional overextension. Adopting a balanced tone underscores that Mirror Leadership should be viewed as an evolving theoretical lens—one that invites empirical scrutiny rather than presuming universal applicability.

6. Conclusion

The originality of the Mirror Leadership model developed in this paper is that it introduces a new meaning of leadership as a neuro-emotional process defined by resonance, reflection, and regulation. This novel design, based on Emotional Appraisal Theory and Polyvagal Theory, views leadership as co-regulation (relational and physiological) over time, and constructs a new conceptual model that goes beyond the previous paradigm of defining leaders as strategic, characterized, or with an ethical fit. Mirror Leadership states that the leader is a psychological anchor and co-appraiser of emotions, as well as a motivator, strategist, producer of meaning, and a psychological healer for teams in uncertainty and crisis. It is also necessary to acknowledge that attributing such an expansive set of roles to leaders may create inflated expectations that are neither feasible nor desirable. Employees may perceive overly intensive emotional involvement as intrusive, paternalistic, or manipulative, especially in multicultural environments where norms of emotional distance differ substantially. Mirror Leadership, therefore, requires ethical limits and cultural sensitivity to ensure that emotional influence remains supportive rather than overreaching. A balanced interpretation of the model emphasizes shared emotional responsibility rather than unilateral psychological stewardship. The gap in the extant body of knowledge concerning the topic of affective neuroscience combined with intercultural leadership communication, which is an area where existing models like transformational and authentic leadership place little emphasis with respect to real-time affective resonance and culture-specific emotional expression, is filled. Mirror Leadership is not only considered to be appropriate but even the sought-after paradigm in what can be described as emotionally charged, hybrid, or high-stakes situations. The construct is based on nonverbal yet powerful affective processes grounded in team cohesion, trust, imagination, and strength. Mirror Leaders, because of their neurobiological effect, catalyze calmness, clarity, and cohesion through micro-behaviors, i.e., relaxed listening, coordinated gestures, facial expression, and voice tone modulation. As a result, this framework will equip leaders with a set of embodied tools to manage the emotional climates in hybrid and multicultural workplaces. The model suggests feasible initiatives, such as emotional feedback loops, reflective listening, and training in intercultural empathy, that can be integrated into human resources practices, executive development programmes, and policies on digital communication to improve organizational well-being and credibility. Locating leadership repositioning as a real-time process mediated by biological and emotional processes that modulate organizational performance and psychological well-being, the authors claim that organizations should redefine emotional intelligence, physiological safety, and affective repair as the main, rather than secondary, leadership skills. Mirror Leadership is a human-based answer to this expanding imperative. It presents an agitation among leaders to seek further transactional and performative empathy toward embodied presence and emotional literacy, qualities typical of the new era of work, where ambiguity, a lack of connection, and tension are common. Mirror Leadership also contributes to the global leadership literature by anticipating cross-cultural adaptability and ethical awareness; it presents a model of culturally flexible, ethically strong, emotionally intelligent global leadership. This work also meets the fundamental needs of securing psychologically safe, emotionally sensitive, and de facto strong organizations; thus, it is a detailed blueprint for developing relational presence and affective resonance in leadership.

Mirror Leadership ultimately signals a paradigm shift in leadership studies by redefining leadership not as a cognitive–behavioral function but as a neuro-emotional, intercultural responsive process of co-regulation, resonance, and ethical relational presence. This theoretical repositioning advances the field by foregrounding the biological mechanisms underlying safety, emotional meaning-making, and embodied trust formation, which traditional models overlook. It also emphasizes that emotional influence is never neutral; therefore, Mirror Leadership introduces an ethical imperative for leaders to use mirroring responsibly to support autonomy, avoid emotional overreach, and ensure followers' psychological dignity. Furthermore, the model's intercultural adaptability demonstrates its global relevance, grounding leadership effectiveness in cultural norms of affective expression, communication context, and power-distance sensitivity. By uniting neuroscience, emotional appraisal, and intercultural communication, Mirror Leadership offers a forward-looking framework to guide leadership development in diverse, hybrid, and morally complex workplaces.

7. Limitations and Future Directions

Although the Mirror Leadership model is a new, interdisciplinary, emotionally sound approach to leadership, it has several limitations. Since it remains a conceptual enquiry, it has not yet been empirically validated, hence limiting the practical and immediate generalizability of its propositions and the validity of its implications. A combination of theoretical concepts from neuroscience and psychology is intellectually sound, but it needs to be operationalized to reduce interpretive bias and avoid delays in application in real-world settings.

One of the major limitations is cultural. The expression of emotional mirroring, co-regulation, and empathy across societies varies and is influenced by norms of expressiveness, hierarchy, and emotional displays. Therefore, Mirror Leadership should be used in the future, bearing in mind that it should include high- and low-context communication patterns, power-distance orientations, and culture-specific notions of trust and empathy to ensure cross-cultural validity. In addition, emotional mirroring and co-regulation can be covert and internally expressed, and difficult to measure, since leadership testing tools cannot capture the nonverbal or physiological components of tone of voice, facial responsiveness, or changes in heart rate. Ethics is another aspect that should receive significant focus, especially the dangers of over-involvement/out-of-control emotion in events where leaders fail and misuse mirroring devices. The ethical limits must be clearly defined in future studies to foster emotional involvement, supplementing followers' autonomy at this stage rather than creating dependency. A still-relevant weakness is cultural variability, since perceptions of emotional mirroring and empathy differ across societies, and the model cannot be applied universally. It is also possible to run the risk of misinterpretation: a mirror reflection can be interpreted as manipulation or as a blend of overemotional resonance, particularly when their conditions are under pressure from emotionally strained situations. The main limitation for future research should be to generate intercultural validation using physiological and behavioral indicators, including heart rate variability, eye tracking, and facial emotion recognition, to empirically measure cross-cultural emotional synchrony and leadership consequences. Combining neurophysiological

measures with a qualitative reflection journal in a mixed-methods research design may help explain how leaders internalize and regulate emotion in context. Additional empirical support for the six propositions presented in this paper should be sought through mixed-methods designs, longitudinal field research, and neurophysiological research, which will help reveal the biological and emotional impact of Mirror Leadership. Cross-cultural studies are also necessary for examining the perspectives on emotional resonance and their practice across diverse organizational and cultural settings.

The orienting culturally adaptive training models and global leadership education would allow the cultural orienting of the Mirror Leadership to be situational to various regions, such as Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, and thus globalize the leadership training in an emotionally intelligent manner. The development of new assessment instruments, such as biometric feedback systems, behavioral rating schemes, and Mirror Leadership inventories, would be more effective at accurately identifying and training Mirror Leaders. Adding the model to executive education and leadership development programs would make it easier to evaluate it in other industries, such as healthcare, education, defense, and digital services. Research on the topic of Mirror Leadership in virtual or AI-assisted environments could provide results about how emotions are regulated in remote (and hybrid) teams. Lastly, a research gap is the need to investigate the model's boundary conditions and identify under what conditions Mirror Leadership can be relied upon, and in what cases it might need to be supplemented by other leadership styles to avoid burnout or emotional overextension.

To sum up, the current research will contribute to the body of knowledge on leadership and intercultural communication by redefining leadership as a biological and culturally rooted emotional process that helps bridge the gap between science and practice. In this way, it opens a new frontier of interdisciplinary interaction by establishing empathy, reflection, and regulation not only as soft skills but also as the future center of sustainable world leadership.

Data availability statement: As this study is conceptual in nature and relies solely on existing literature, no primary data or confidential materials were generated or used. All sources referenced are publicly available and cited appropriately within the manuscript.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and contributor(s) and do not necessarily reflect JICC's or editors' official policy or position. All liability for harm done to individuals or property as a result of any ideas, methods, instructions, or products mentioned in the content is expressly disclaimed.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process: During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used ChatGPT for copy-editing. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

References

Abraham, R. (1999). Emotional intelligence in organizations: A conceptualization. *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs, 125*(2), 209–224.

Andela, M., & Truchot, D. (2017). Emotional dissonance and burnout: The moderating role of team reflexivity and re-evaluation. *Stress and Health, 33*(3), 179–189. https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2695

Anderson, C. J. (2003). The psychology of doing nothing: Forms of decision avoidance result from reason and emotion. *Psychological Bulletin, 129*(1), 139–167. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.1.139

Ashkanasy, N. M., Härtel, C. E., & Daus, C. S. (2002). Diversity and emotion: The new frontiers in organizational behavior research. *Journal of Management, 28*(3), 307–338. https://doi.org/10.1177/014920630202800304

Bailey, C., Madden, A., Alfes, K., & Fletcher, L. (2017). The meaning, antecedents, and outcomes of employee engagement: A narrative synthesis. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 19*(1), 31–53. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12077

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1997). Writing narrative literature reviews. *Review of General Psychology, 1*(3), 311–320. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.1.3.311

Beatty, B. R. (2013). The emotions of leadership. In D. Wise, P. Bradshaw, & C. Riches (Eds.), *Educational management: Major themes in education* (Vol. 4, pp. 179–201). Routledge.

Bellis, P., Cunial, M., & Trabucchi, D. (2024). Mastering hybrid worlds through digital leadership: The role of agility in fostering innovation. *Business Horizons, 67*(4), 369–380. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2024.04.002

Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2005). *Resonant leadership: Renewing yourself and connecting with others through mindfulness, hope, and compassion*. Harvard Business School Press.

Campbell, A. (2017). Forgiveness and reconciliation as an organizational leadership competency within restorative transitional justice instruments. *International Journal of Servant Leadership, 12*(1), 1–40. https://doi.org/10.33972/ijsl.92

Cornelsen, M. L. (2025). *Does emotional intelligence in leaders influence emotional leadership styles and employee burnout?* (Doctoral dissertation, ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa). http://hdl.handle.net/10400.5/100376

Cusack, L., Smith, M., Hegney, D., Rees, C. S., Breen, L. J., Witt, R. R., ... Cheung, K. (2016). Exploring environmental factors in nursing workplaces that promote psychological resilience: Constructing a unified theoretical model. *Frontiers in Psychology, 7*, 600. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00600

Depue, R. A., & Lenzenweger, M. F. (2006). A multidimensional neurobehavioral model of personality disturbance. In S. Strack (Ed.), *Differentiating normal and abnormal personality* (2nd ed., pp. 210–261). Springer Publishing Company.

Dirani, K. M., Abadi, M., Alizadeh, A., Barhate, B., Garza, R. C., Gunasekara, N., ... Majzun, Z. (2020). Leadership competencies and the essential role of human resource development in times of crisis: A response to Covid-19 pandemic. *Human Resource Development International, 23*(4), 380–394. https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2020.1780078

Ellsworth, P. C., & Scherer, K. R. (2003). Appraisal processes in emotion. In R. J. Davidson, K. R. Scherer, & H. H. Goldsmith (Eds.), *Handbook of affective sciences* (pp. 572–595). Oxford University Press.

Froese, F. J., Blay, T., Gibson, C. B., Shaffer, M. A., & Benitez, J. (2025). Global virtual work: A review, integrative framework, and future research opportunities. *Journal of International Business Studies, 56*(6), 691–719. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-025-00775-1

Galvin, B. M., Badura, K., LePine, J., & LePine, M. (2024). A theoretical integration of leader emergence and leadership effectiveness: Over, under, and congruent emergence. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 45*(2), 295–312. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2724

George, J. M. (2000). Emotions and leadership: The role of emotional intelligence. *Human Relations, 53*(8), 1027–1055. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726700538001

Ginsberg, R. (2020). Navigating emotional waters in schools: Becoming an emotionally adaptable leader. *International Journal on Lifelong Education and Leadership, 6*(2), 13–30. https://doi.org/10.25233/ijlel.799828

Porges, S. W. (2022). *Polyvagal theory: A science of safety*. Frontiers in Integrative Neuroscience, 16, 871227. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnint.2022.871227

Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R. E., & McKee, A. (2013). *Primal leadership: Unleashing the power of emotional intelligence* (2nd ed.). Harvard Business Review Press.

Goodall, E. (2021). *Facilitating interoceptive awareness as a self-management and self-regulation tool to increase engagement in learning and education* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Southern Queensland). https://doi.org/10.26192/F91Y-SX08

Gooty, J., Connelly, S., Griffith, J., & Gupta, A. (2010). Leadership, affect, and emotions: A state of the science review. *The Leadership Quarterly, 21*(6), 979–1004. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2010.10.005

Hesselbein, F., & Shrader, A. R. (Eds.). (2008). *Leader to Leader 2: Enduring insights on leadership from the Leader to Leader Institute's award-winning journal*. Jossey-Bass. https://doi.org/10.1002/ltl.285

Hoch, J. E., Bommer, W. H., Dulebohn, J. H., & Wu, D. (2018). Do ethical, authentic, and servant leadership explain variance above and beyond transformational leadership? A meta-analysis. *Journal of Management, 44*(2), 501–529. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316665461

Jasubhai, S. (2025). Leadership Dynamics: The Interplay of Cognition, Emotion, and Resilience. *International Journal of Research in Medical and Clinical Science, 3*(01), 134–140. https://doi.org/10.70829/ijrmcs.v03.i01.014

Jasubhai, S. (2025). Leadership Dynamics: The Interplay of Cognition, Emotion, and Resilience. *International Journal of Research in Medical and Clinical Science*, 3(01), 134-140. https://doi.org/10.70829/ijrmcs.v03.i01.014

Javalagi, A. A., Newman, D. A., & Li, M. (2024). Personality and leadership: Meta-analytic review of cross-cultural moderation, behavioral mediation, and honesty-humility. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 109*(9), 1489–1517. https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0001182

Jian, G. (2022). From empathic leader to empathic leadership practice: An extension to relational leadership theory. *Human Relations, 75*(5), 931–955. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726721998450

Kempster, S., Iszatt-White, M., & Brown, M. (2019). Authenticity in leadership: Reframing relational transparency through the lens of emotional labour. *Leadership, 15*(3), 319–338. https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715017746788

Kunnanatt, J. T. (2008). Emotional intelligence: Theory and description: A competency model for interpersonal effectiveness. *Career Development International, 13*(7), 614–629. https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430810911083

Lazarus, R. S. (2006). *Stress and emotion: A new synthesis*. Springer Publishing Company.

Lazarus, R. S. (1991). *Emotion and adaptation*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195069945.001.0001

Lehmann-Willenbrock, N. (2025). Dynamic interpersonal processes at work: Taking social interactions seriously. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 12*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-110622-035421

Liu, F., & Maitlis, S. (2014). Emotional dynamics and strategizing processes: A study of strategic conversations in top team meetings. *Journal of Management Studies, 51*(2), 202–234. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2012.01087.x

Luthans, F. (2002). Positive organizational behavior: Developing and managing psychological strengths. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 16*(1), 57–72. https://doi.org/10.5465/ame.2002.6640181

Marstand, A. F., Epitropaki, O., & Kapoutsis, I. (2025). 'Distant but close': Leadership behaviours, psychological distance, employee coping and effectiveness in remote work contexts. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 98*(1), e12544. https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12544

Mehler, M., Balint, E. M., Gralla, M., Pößnecker, T., Gast, M., Hölzer, M., Kösters, M., & Gündel, H. (2024). Training emotional competencies at the workplace: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Psychology, 12*(1), 718. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-024-02198-3

Miller-Fox, G. (2022). *A neurobiological experiment of a mindfulness training intervention, designed to lower cortisol levels of officers who perform emotional labor* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Utah).

Mohase, K., Donald, F., & Israel, N. (2025). Inclusive leadership, psychological safety, and employee voice in remote and hybrid work employees. *South African Journal of Psychology, 55*(3), 432–446. https://doi.org/10.1177/00812463251365484

Moors, A., Ellsworth, P. C., Scherer, K. R., & Frijda, N. H. (2013). Appraisal theories of emotion: State of the art and future development. *Emotion Review, 5*(2), 119–124. https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073912468165

Muss, C., Tüxen, D., & Fürstenau, B. (2025). Empathy in leadership: A systematic literature review on the effects of empathetic leaders in organizations. *Management Review Quarterly*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-024-00472-7

Mansoor, I. (2025). Exploring the Interplay Between Attachment Styles and Neuroception: Insights from Polyvagal Theory. *International Journal of Social Sciences Bulletin,* 3(10), 328-336. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17337595

Zeleke, L., Guyo, W., & Moronge, M. (2025). Adaptive Leadership Styles and Organizational Performance: Evidence from Local NGOs in Ethiopia. *Innovation Journal of Social Sciences and Economic Review*, 7(2), 68-75. https://doi.org/10.36923/ijsser.v7i2.323

Petitta, L., & Naughton, S. (2015). Mapping the association of emotional contagion to leaders, colleagues, and clients: Implications for leadership. *Organization Management Journal,* 12(3), 178–192. https://doi.org/10.1080/15416518.2015.1073577

Pinsky, D., & Young, D. S. M. (2009). *The mirror effect*. HarperCollins.

Porges, S. W. (2009). The polyvagal theory: New insights into adaptive reactions of the autonomic nervous system. *Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine, 76*(Suppl 2), S86–S90. https://doi.org/10.3949/ccjm.76.s2.17

Porges, S. W. (2022). Polyvagal theory: A science of safety. *Frontiers in Integrative Neuroscience, 16*, 871227. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnint.2022.871227

Porges, S. W., & Furman, S. A. (2011). The early development of the autonomic nervous system provides a neural platform for social behaviour: A polyvagal perspective. *Infant and Child Development, 20*(1), 106–118. https://doi.org/10.1002/icd.688

Rajpurohit, N., Sharma, D., Sharma, D. K., & Jain, T. (2025). Impact of artificial intelligence on innovative work behaviour of employees. *International Journal of Process Management and Benchmarking, 21(3), 322-341.* https://doi.org/10.1504/IJPMB.2025.149395

Rice, D. B., & Day, S. W. (2022). The impact of hindrance appraisals on leader bottom-line mentality: Implications for leadership drawbacks and the amplification effect of leader neuroticism. *International Journal of Stress Management, 29*(3), 229–241. https://doi.org/10.1037/str0000253

Sacramento, C., Lyubovnikova, J., Martinaityte, I., Gomes, C., Curral, L., & Juhasz-Wrench, A. (2024). Being open, feeling safe, and getting creative: The role of team means openness to experience in the emergence of team psychological safety and team creativity. *Journal of Product Innovation Management, 41*(1), 12–35. https://doi.org/10.1111/jpim.12699

Khari, R., Surbhi, Muskan, Abeer, Sehrawat, D., & Nangia, R. (2025). *Towards the future of work: Systematic insights into post-pandemic challenges and opportunities*. SSRN. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5255431

Shaikh, S., & Waykole, M. V. (2013). Feelings leadership: redefining business leadership concept with significance of mirror neurons from neuroscience and biological context. *EXCEL International Journal of Multidisciplinary Management Studies*, 3(11), 110-125.

Srivastava, S. K. D. (2005). *Education, skills, and competencies*. Gyan Publishing House.

Studer, Q. (2019). *The busy leader's handbook: How to lead people and places that thrive*. Wiley.

Sugiarto, I. (2024). Exploration of empathy-based leadership in the context of employee retention in the creative industry. *Journal of Contemporary Administration and Management (ADMAN), 2*(3), 584–590. https://doi.org/10.61100/adman.v2i3.201

Teboul, E. (2025). *Feminine intelligence: How visionary leaders can reshape business for good*. Wiley.

Treviño García, L. E., & Christensen, J. O. (2025). Hybrid work and mental distress: A cross-sectional study of 24,763 office workers in the Norwegian public sector. *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00420-025-02136-9

Tucker, R. (2022). *Vagus nerve: How to relieve anxiety, reduce chronic inflammation, and prevent illness by stimulating vagal tone to restore balance*. Independently published.

Valencia, À. V. (2023). Self-effects in AI-mediated communication. *Hipertext.net, 26*, 47–52. https://doi.org/10.31009/hipertext.net.2023.i26.07

Robnett, B. (2004). Emotional resonance, social location, and strategic framing. *Sociological Focus*, 37(3), 195-212.Williams, M. (2007). Building genuine trust through interpersonal emotion management: A threat regulation model of trust and collaboration across boundaries. *Academy of Management Review, 32*(2), 595–621. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2007.24351867

Wirtz, N., Rigotti, T., Otto, K., & Loeb, C. (2017). What about the leader? Crossover of emotional exhaustion and work engagement from followers to leaders. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 22*(1), 86–97. https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000024

Ybarra, O., Kross, E., & Sanchez-Burks, J. (2014). The "big idea" that is yet to be: Toward a more motivated, contextual, and dynamic model of emotional intelligence. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 28*(2), 93–107. https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2012.0106

Žvelc, G., & Žvelc, M. (2021). *Integrative psychotherapy: A mindfulness- and compassion-oriented approach*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429290480

About the Authors

Muhammad Atif Bashir has 18 years of experience in academia, research, and project leadership. He serves as a Research Officer and Visiting Faculty member at the Institute of Business Management and Administrative Sciences at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan, where he teaches management and research methods. His academic and research interests focus on business management, organizational performance, and sustainable development. He has contributed to various scholarly publications and is actively advancing management research in Pakistan and beyond.

Saeed Banihashemi is an Associate Professor at the University of Technology Sydney, Australia. He has published widely in peer-reviewed journals and contributes to applied research in improving building practices and sustainability performance. He received nearly *5,000* citations.

Muhammad Taimoor is a research scholar in Management Sciences at the Institute of Business Management and Administrative Sciences, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. His research focuses on entrepreneurship, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and strategic management. He is passionate about advancing knowledge on entrepreneurial innovation and business growth in emerging economies.

Mohammad Fakhrul Islam is a doctoral researcher at the Doctoral School of Economic and Regional Sciences, Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences (MATE), Gödöllő, Hungary. He is also working as a visiting researcher at Széchenyi István University, Győr, Hungary. He also holds research positions at the College of Business Administration, International University of Business Agriculture and Technology (IUBAT), Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Daffodil International University, Dhaka, Bangladesh. He has been working in the Department of Business Administration at Stamford University, Bangladesh, as a full-time faculty member. His research interests include sustainability, innovation, Circular economy, GHRM, and Energy. He has published research in top-ranked Scopus-, ABDC-, ABS-, and WoS-indexed journals.

Katalin Szabó is an associate professor at the Hungarian University of Agricultural and Life Sciences (MATE), working as the Deputy Director for General Affairs at the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics, Head of the Department of Agribusiness Management and Leadership, and a supervisor at the Doctoral School of Regional and Economic Sciences. Her teaching and research interests focus on successful organizational performance, strategic human resource management, and leadership and organizational studies. She is a certified economist, English translator, chartered accountant, Williams LifeSkills® facilitator and trainer, qualified coach, certified expert in the Persolog® Behavior, Personality, Resilience, and Time Management models, and a Thomas International High Potential Trait Indicator (HPTI) consultant.