LEADERSHIP: ARE WE BORN WITH IT OR DO WE EARN IT?

Silviu-Gabriel BACIU

Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania
baciusilviu20@stud.ase.ro

Abstract

Leadership is present in every aspect of our lives, whether it's in the job we have, the university we attend, or any other part of our experience. Therefore, leadership becomes a crucial element in both personal and organizational life. However, a question persists: are leadership abilities inherent, or are they developed through experience and learning? This paper begins by exploring theoretical concepts and leadership abilities, and then, through literature review, attempts to answer the question posed in the title. It does so by analysing relevant literature and synthesizing results from research papers indexed in well-known databases. The research findings suggest that while leaders may be born with specific abilities, they still require experience and certain developmental steps to become the best leaders. Future directions of study and limitations of the present work are also discussed in the final part of the paper.
Keywords: abilities; born leader; leadership; made leader.

1. INTRODUCTION

Radu, Deaconu and Frăsineanu (2017) emphasize the importance of leadership in business nowadays, taking into consideration a new look at the leadership characteristics that offer success in the business world. Leadership can also be present in any other aspect of our lives, giving this concept a great meaning for success. In order to be successful you need to be a great leader. So, the debate regarding whether leaders are born this way or do they become leaders threw development is important for researchers. Some argue that leadership is an innate trait, others that it is cultivated with experience, education or any other ways.

The chosen theme is motivated by the desire to understand whether a leader is born this way or develops in the course of his or her life, thus the aim of the paper becomes the understanding of the concept of leadership and its components. This paper is relevant for those who want to understand the notions surrounding leadership and have the same research question. The importance of studying this field is related to the understanding of the concept because it can help in clarifying the predisposition that a human being has, in order to become a leader, the factors that matter in becoming a leader, how to improve leadership traits, to increase organizational performance and to address misconceptions regarding this subject.

Thus, the **main objective of the research** is to find research papers which ask the same question and critically examine the longstanding debate of whether leaders are born or made by conducting a comprehensive literature review. This study aims to explore the various theoretical perspectives on leadership, analysing both the traits and characteristics associated with inherent leadership qualities, as well as the skills and experiences that can be cultivated through education, training, and practice. By synthesizing existing research, the paper seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the complex nature of leadership development and to offer a balanced view of how both innate attributes and external influences contribute to the formation of effective leaders.

Despite extensive research on leadership, there remains a fundamental debate regarding whether leadership is an innate trait, with individuals born as leaders, or whether it is a set of skills that can be developed over time. Existing literature provides insights into both perspectives, with some scholars emphasizing the role of inherent qualities such as charisma and decisiveness, while others highlight the impact of experience, education, and situational factors in shaping effective leaders. However, there is a lack of consensus on the relative weight of these factors and how they interact. Furthermore, much of the existing research tends to focus on either one side of the argument—either the "born" or "made" aspect—without thoroughly examining

the potential for a nuanced, integrative approach. **The paper aims to fill this research gap** by synthesizing the existing literature on both perspectives and offering a comprehensive review that explores the interplay between innate characteristics and developmental factors in leadership. By doing so, it seeks to provide a clearer understanding of how leadership emerges and how it can be nurtured within various contexts.

This paper tries to answer the following **research questions**:
RQ1. Are leaders born or are they made?
RQ2. Which are the traits and skills that contribute to the formation of effective leaders?

It is structured starting with the presentation of theoretical concepts related to leadership, leadership styles and necessary skills of a leader and continues with explaining what born leader or trained leader appear as concepts in the scientific literature. The research methodology explains the main steps followed in order to select the research papers that are subject to the literature review. The main analysis is represented by the study of scientific articles in the field of leadership, while focusing on born or trained leaders. The last section of the paper substantiates main conclusions and emphasizes the limits of the research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Regardless of the context that we use this concept, we often hear the word, *leadership*, whether we speak about the workplace, academic environment or a group of friends. In terms of the possibility of defining this concept, Philip Sadler (2003) suggests that leadership captures a larger concept, which is difficult to describe in a simple definition, as audiences may understand different things. The literature presents a variety of definitions of this notion, but the most succinct one is concerned with the decision to influence others to achieve their goals (Hughes, 2009). This simple meaning helps us to outline a general idea about this broad domain of leadership from a leader perspective. Also, we can direct the concept where it is generally used, inside the organisation that we work for, where the authors define this concept as the influence on subordinates through which they can accomplish their objectives through voluntary actions of the latter (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2014). Thus, we can grasp a characteristic of leadership, whereby the person influences the people around him to follow his example through his actions.

A complex definition is offered by Silva (2016) who states that leadership is defined as a process whereby interaction, in a conductive context, is accepted by some people following a leader to achieve a common goal. The author of this definition emphasises that this implies the following aspects (Silva, 2016) (1) It is a process, not a human quality; (2) It suggests that it is a direct influence on subordinates; (3) It is dependent on the context in which the leader finds himself in; (4) Subordinates accept the leader voluntarily; (5) The purpose of the process is to achieve a common goal. Although the definition emphasises that leadership is a process, while the literature suggests that it is a characteristic of the leader, Sadler (2003) points out that, in addition to these two possibilities, leadership can also be a role within the team, but this characterisation of the concept is influenced by the context in which it is used.

Leadership can help us to manage our activities efficiently. Hogan (2005) presents the benefit offered by the concept; this is useful in organising collective efforts in a conducive way, being a good tool to increase effectiveness, but the author considers it closely related to the smooth functioning of the organisation. However, in any activity difficulties may arise, whether we are talking about the management itself or those who carry out the activity. Bertocci (2009) points out the negative effects of conflicts that affect the economic course of the company, but which some leaders can use to their advantage, and which can even be positive for the company in the long run. In order to become familiar with this concept, Sadler (2003) presents the myths governing this subject.

Mith1. Leadership can be found in any person, even if not in a leadership position.
Mith2. Everyone has the ability to learn by experience.
Mith3. Not all leaders are charismatic.
Mith4. The larger the organisation, the greater the number of leaders can increase.
Mith5. The concept is not based on the exercise of power by the leader.

Through these five myths, we can see that leadership can be understood in many ways, some even wrong, but which can be straightened out with the right explanations. For the same reason, to better understand this notion, Ulrich and Smallwood (2012) draw attention to the rules that a leader should follow:

Rule 1. The leader must create the future of the company through the resources at his disposal (material, financial, human, and informational), test innovative ideas, all of which are covered by the umbrella of a desired future;

Rule 2. The leader must transform the strategy into actions, assign them to subordinates or colleagues on the same hierarchical level, and ensure that teams work well together;

Rule 3. The person in charge of the organisation or the team should identify, build and attract future human resources, which can be called 'talents', with the leader's efforts focused on reaching the maximum potential of new employees, the ultimate goal being the wellbeing of the company;

Rule 4. The leader should invest in his own development, learning new skills, even if it is achieved through failures or with the help of other people. This helps in dealing with unexpected situations that may arise.

The person who possesses the quality of leading a team or who exercises such a process conducts these actions in a specific way. DePree (1998) underlines the importance that leaders should take into account, giving freedom to followers, referring to the skills that they need to emphasise, the objective being to increase innovation. However, the literature captures the way in which researchers have designed the division of leadership styles. Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy (2014) suggest the existence of two categories. The first category refers to **transformational leadership.** This type of leadership captures the style of leader that underlines the development of employees' skills and needs, focussing on the values of subordinates, with the aim of making the company's future as good as possible. The second category refers to **transactional leadership**. It is a type of leadership related to management by objectives in which employees are rewarded for achieving certain performance indicators, but less emphasis is placed on improving performance.

Another author who presents in his paper leadership styles is Bertocci (2009), dividing them also in two categories, as further presented. The **formal leader** holds power or authority through his position as manager or supervisor, differing according to the hierarchical level, while the **informal leader** does not formally hold a position of leadership but can exert influence over others; this is possible through the personal abilities of the person who possesses them. The risk is that an informal leader may have a conflict with the formal leader. Thus, this division gives us an overall view of leadership; the person who possesses the necessary skills may even be a new employee. Schramm (2005) offers another classification for leadership styles: open and closed leadership. **Open leadership** refers to the power being equally shared between leaders and employees, followers showing initiative, engagement and independence. In case of **closed leadership,** the power is in the leader's hand and the power is shared unequally.

Eagly and Johnson (1990, cited in Negurșa & Cristică, 2024) offer a perspective regarding the gender and the type of leadership style used. Women tend to offer employees the opportunity to contribute to decision-making, being more collaborative, cooperative and they maintain interpersonal connections. Men are being authoritarian, direct and limit subordinates' access to decisions, being competitive, assertive and task oriented. Radu, Deaconu and Frăsineanu (2017) support the same idea that strengthen gender related leadership styles. Feminine leadership pay personal attention to employees and work environment, while men are instrumental focusing on giving directions.

In order to be an accomplished leader, there are certain skills that researchers consider necessary. One of the goals of leaders is to create future leaders, in the sense that they need to be identified, developed and prepared for future challenges (DePree, 1998). Another point of view regarding abilities is offered by Vasile (2014) which accentuates the importance that a leader must consider regarding its subordinates. He should empower and train people to tackle new challenges, realign their values, shift their perspective and develop new forms of behaviour. Therefore, we can assume there is a need for some existing skills in order to develop them in others.

Bradberry and Greaves (2012) presented in their research work three main categories of skills. They are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1 - CATEGORIZATION OF LEADER BASIC SKILLS

No. crt.	Category	Basic skills	Comments
1	Strategy	Vision	providing a new vision for others
		Perspicacity	understanding the issues within his area of expertise and from the organisation
		Planning	foreseeing future events
		Confidence	taking the risks necessary to achieve results
2	Action	Decision Making	choosing the optimal option in a given time frame
		Communication	creating the environment for free self-expression
		Motivation	the power to motivate others
3	Results	Risk Management	sticking to a set of actions, even though they may pose a huge risk to the leader's position in the organisation
		Result Orientation	staying focused whatever the situation
		Agility	adapting to any context

SOURCE: AUTHOR'S SYNTHESIS BASED ON BRADBERRY AND GREAVES (2012)

The above table includes the basic skills that a leader must have, but the same authors, Bradberry and Greaves (2012) speak about the adaptive skills which contain abilities that differentiate true leaders from the rest of the world. The adaptive skills are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2 - CATEGORIZATION OF LEADER ADAPTIVE SKILLS

No. crt.	Category	Adaptive skills	Comments
1	Emotional intelligence	Self-awareness	understanding your own feelings in different situations
		Personal Management	directing behaviour positively
		Social Awareness	understanding of the emotions of others
		Relationship Management	the success of interactions depends on managing emotions
2	The inner laws of the organisation	Correctness of decisions	understanding subordinates regarding the accepting decisions and how they affect them
		Information sharing	explaining the process by which a decision was made
		Caring for results	the care offered to all employees in terms of their well being
3	Character	Integrity	emphasising ethics and value through actions
		Credibility	offering support and commitment to others
		Value Differentiation	understanding the need to diversify human resources
4	Development	Learning	continuous experience about oneself and the environment
		Developing those around	opportunities for growth and development of new skills for employees

SOURCE: AUTHOR'S SYNTHESIS BASED ON BRADBERRY AND GREAVES (2012)

In addition to these core abilities that a leader should acquire, Bolden (2004) suggests that leaders need abilities that refer to processing information, project management, and customer relationship management, all of these being useful to build partnerships, creating speeches, and solving all activities through methods, sometimes less known, making them accomplished entrepreneurs. Therefore, leaders need to acquire or possess certain skills that help them perform the activities of the organization. DePree (1998) affirms that

leaders need to acquire or possess certain maturity, referring to self-awareness, belongingness, responsibility, and equality to others. In this sense, the position a leader holds, whether formal or informal, requires a certain degree of dedication.

The aim of this paper starts from the question in the title: Are we born with leadership skills or do we acquire them? Fiedler (1981) argues that most leaders are chosen and evaluated based on how they perform in the company, thus taking into account the person's experience and competence or similar previous jobs. Therefore, the question needs answer from the literature. Marques (2010) says that an accomplished leader is born like any other human being, but he is special in that he comes to this world to become a leader, assimilating knowledge differently as he develops. This opportunity is offered by the skills that he was born with, and his aspiration to become a leader is different. It helps us to explain how a born leader has a different start from other people, his purpose being to become a leader since childhood. The same author (2009) through his study expresses what are those abilities that an accomplished leader has: morals and values, ethics, integrity, vision, respect, passion, commitment, compassion, sense of justice, kindness, forgiveness, courage, listening, inspiration, authenticity, connectedness, involvement, initiative, and the effort to make a change.

Another author who speaks about born leaders is Sposato (2024) who underlines that they express charisma, confidence, vision and have the ability to motivate others and to take difficult decisions from a young age. These skills belong to a leader from birth, and with these skills a leader manages to have a major impact in their leadership career. Still, education, experience, and practice help in shaping leadership and changing the working environment (Jeffrey and Sposato, 2023, cited in Sposato, 2024). The identical idea is underlined by (Mishra and Pandey, 2019) who affirm that practice and exposure to different leadership contexts can help in development of leaders' abilities.

At the same time, Ahmed et al. (2016, cited in Penttilä, 2021) bring up Thomas Carlyle's theory entitled 'Great Man Theory' which suggests that leaders are born with certain skills and personal characteristics that differentiate themselves from people that do not wish to become leaders, Penttilä arguing that leaders are born, and leadership skills are a gift. All these authors who argue that leaders are born suggest that this is not entirely the case, because it takes experience and learning to become a leader in the true sense of the notion.

Taking into account ideas expressed above, one can argue that there is a need for a certain type of training to become leaders. Swaroop and Prasad (2013) asserts that leadership is an ability, not a talent, this aspect presuming that this concept is acquired through education, learning, practice and experience, not that leaders are born. Sposato (2024) also responds to this discussion and underlines that while some leaders possess certain characteristics that confer a predisposition towards leadership, the true leaders require practice and learning. Another point of view is offered by Awodun and Ajia (2012) who argue that leaders are born like any other person, but become leaders by acquiring the skills and knowledge to seize opportunities that arise. Also, Bolden (2004) confirms that although personal qualities are very important, they are not enough to exercise a leadership role. Therefore, the career that a leader has represents a significant footprint for the way in which he acquires necessary skills and how he applies them.

As highlighted in the previous section, an accomplished leader requires certain attributes in order to perform at the highest level. Therefore, there is a possibility that some attributes may be missing, but may emerge through certain training or experience. An explanation of the concept of leadership skills development is provided by McCauley et al. (1998, cited in Day, 2000) who explain it as a developed ability of organizational members to engage in leadership roles. They induce the idea of the concept in the organization, but it can also be directed at the individual level. McCall (2004) asserts that experience is the main pillar for leadership learning, which is more important than learning through courses. The same author (2004) suggests that leaders may learn nothing from experiences or draw the wrong conclusions, while career repetitiveness stagnates their career path. The most important aspect is sharing the necessary experience to the right people, but in fact, what is needed in order to become an accomplished leader?

3. METHODOLOGY

To address the above mentioned research questions, a literature review was conducted. The author identified, selected, and assessed relevant papers in the field to gather and analyse information about leaders. The characteristic of the review is emphasized by Păcesilă and Ciocoiu (2017): objectivity, transparency and coherence. As Pollock and Berge (2018) underline, a literature review is taken to identify the main relevant papers that can help to resolve the question of the paper and to synthesise the findings. Aromataris and Pearson (2014) point out the main aspects regarding the defining features of a literature analysis.

(1) Identifying documents

Documents identified from:
Web of Science (n=15)
Scopus (n=55)
Science Direct (n=13)
(n=83)

Records removed *before screening*:

Duplicate records removed
(n=17)

(2) Screening

Records screened
(n=66)

Records excluded
Other type of documents:
chapters, editorial (n=19)
Other language than English
(n=4)
No author (n=2)

Documents sought for retrieval
(n=41)

Documents not retrieved
(n=21)

Documents assessed for
eligibility (n=20)

(3) Eligibility

Documents excluded:
Reason: content inconsistent
with the aim of this research
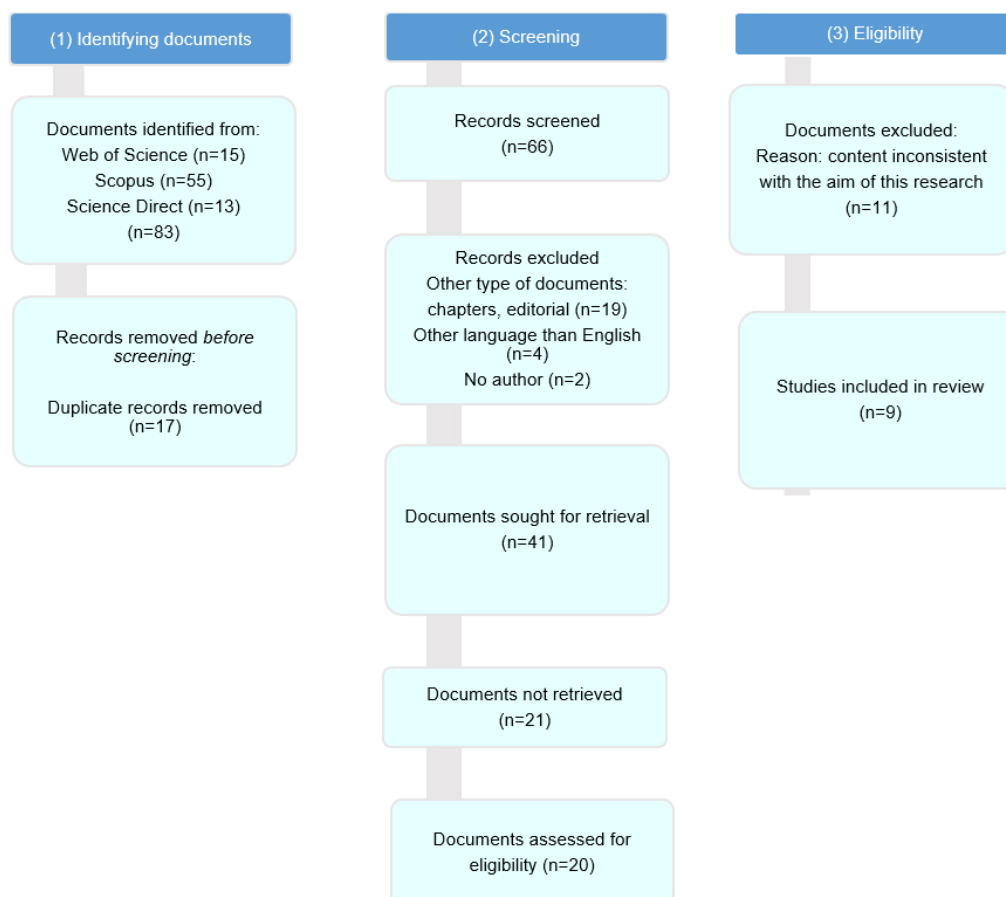(n=11)

Studies included in review
(n=9)

Figure 1. The research steps
Source: author's conception based on Page et al. (2021)

Firstly, the objectives and questions must be clearly defined, and secondly, we need to indicate the inclusion and exclusion criteria to determine the eligibility of studies. After that, we need to do research to establish the relevant studies that are going to be included. The next step is to measure the quality of papers and to exclude the ones that are under a certain grade, followed by analysing the validity of results. The extracted date is analysed, and we present and synthesise the findings extracted. In the end, we conclude with the methodology and methods used to conduct the review. The whole process was based on the PRISMA methodology (Farrus, 2023). Figure 1 briefly emphasizes this process.

The first step in this approach is to set the keywords, which are selected by considering the aspects analysed in this paper. Therefore, the selected words are from the paper's question: 'born leader' and 'made leader'. The search using the mentioned keywords was performed in December 2024 in the following databases: Web of Science, Scopus and ScienceDirect, three of the most important sources of scientific documentation. All three allows us to search for a variety of fields such as topic, title, abstract, publisher, etc., and provide the latest research papers from a variety of fields, published in well-known scientific journals.

The search was conducted in English within the 'title' field of all scientific databases. By using the keywords mentioned above and placing the '*' symbol at the end of the word "leader" to capture its plural form and related terms such as "leadership", we retrieved 15 documents from Web of Science. Moving on, another search has been conducted in a similar way, within the Scopus database (the search revealed 55 documents). Last, but not least, the search conducted in the ScienceDirect database, returned 13 documents. After eliminating duplicates, keeping only English written documents, excluding papers with access issues, as well as papers without authors, chapters and editorial materials, a total of 9 documents remained, published between 1997 and 2024. All of these focus on the question of whether a leader is born or made. In terms of document type, they are all articles reporting original research by the authors.

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The selected papers are distributed in 9 different journals: Leadership & Organization Development Journal, Twin Research and Human Genetics, Industrial and commercial Training, Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal, Journal of Financial Economics, Journal of Shoulder and Elbow Surgery, Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, Organizational Dynamics and American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education. Although the temporal range spans 27 years, the number of papers focusing on our topic is relatively limited. However, a positive aspect is the increasing trend in publication numbers, with 5 of the papers being written in the last 7 years. The results of content analysis point out different aspects regarding the subject, as we can see in Table 3, and can lead to a conclusion regarding the following subject regarding leaders.

TABLE 3 - PAPER ANALYSIS

No.	Paper	Methodology used	Abilities described in the paper	Conclusion	Leader	
					born	made
1	Rowley (1997)	Literature review	Both basic and adaptive skills	The field of education has specific features that require adapting to different environments, so leaders are made.		√
2	Johnson et al. (1998)	Questionnaire	Originality, popularity, sociability, judgement, aggressiveness, desire to excel, humour, cooperativeness, liveliness, and athletic ability	Transformational leadership demonstrates a clearly genetic determination, but further research of the transactional leadership domain is needed	√	√
3	Joan (2009)	Interview	Morals, values, ethics, integrity, honesty and trust, vision, respect, passion, commitment, compassion, justice, kindness, forgiveness, courage, love, deep listening, inspired and inspiring, authenticity, connection with one's being, multi-dimensional, fulfilment, initiative, change	Leaders are modelled by life and by the experiences gained while growing up.		√
4	Piaw and Ting (2014)	Survey	Does not refer to skills but to thinking style (critical or creative) and to leadership style (open or closed)	School grades, the type of school, gender, age, working experience, educational status have an impact on the leader.	√	√

No.	Paper	Methodology used	Abilities described in the paper	Conclusion	Leader	
					born	made
5	Boerma et al. (2017)	Debate	Both basic and adaptive skills	Leaders emerge from a blend of genetic predisposition and development shaped by reactions to environmental influences.	√	√
6	Adams et al. (2018)	Stattistical analysis of large scale data Traits analysis	Basic skills	Talent is needed in order to reach a top position in a company.	√	√
7	Avolio and Hannah (2020)	Literature review Empirical review	Adaptive skills	Leadership development is valuable if both the leader and the organisation are prepared for this step. Leadership is a learned skill, developed through experience, education, and adaptability.		√
8	Sposato (2024)	Literature review	Understand, empathize with others, manage emotions, build strong relationships, charisma, confidence, inspire and emotional intelligence	Some individuals may possess qualities from birth that help them in leadership roles, but the true leaders require learning, deliberate practice, and adaptation.		√
9	Klifto et al. (2024)	Critical analysis	Enthusiastic, positive, effective leadership behaviour, open and easy to work with, strong in communication and organization, dedicated, and hardworking or motivated	The organisation needs to invest in physician leaders, which points out, one more time, the idea of the process of making a leader.	√	√

SOURCE: AUTHOR'S SYNTHESIS BASED ON MENTIONED PAPERS

As seen in the above table, there are nine papers which actually have the question from the very beginning, within the title. All managed to answer, there are both similarities and differences in terms of approach, methodology, highlighted values and conclusions. To begin with, Rowley (1997) offers a perspective on academic leadership, the definition of leadership and then on the trait theories of leadership. The author suggests that this theory refers to the innate qualities that a good leader has and underlines that the combination of personal characteristics is seen as an important contribution to effective leadership, not to individual personality and talent. The downside of this theory is that it does not take into account the context in which leadership is exercised. After this chapter, the author speaks about style and contingency theories in which we find that managers can modify their styles and that leadership skills can be learnt. Following leadership in a learning organisation are the conclusions that do not offer us an answer for the question within the title, but strengthen the idea that effective leadership is central to the success of any organization.

Another relevant paper is Johnson et al. (1998) in which the authors included an interview in their paper to answer the question in the title. In the beginning, they state that there is a clear difference between leaders and non-leaders, situational, organisational and motivational characteristics affect the success of the leaders. After explaining the transactional and transformational leadership, they induce the idea that heritability should be examined, as it is an important factor to answer the question. The next step in the paper is to explain the method used, 247 adult twin pairs completing a self-report questionnaire. Univariate genetic analyses indicated

that both factors were heritable, with transformational leadership demonstrating nonadditive heritability, and transactional leadership demonstrating additive heritability. The end of the paper reflects on the debate of the matter, but provides preliminary data regarding the contribution of genetic and environmental factors to leadership styles.

The article published by Joan (2009) the author offers the question in the title an early answer, as he affirms that leaders are born as all humans are, but are modelled by life and by the experiences the leader obtained while growing up. At the same time, the leader can be born with certain skills that enhance the chances of becoming a leader.

Piaw and Ting (2014) begin their paper by introducing a type of leadership style, then they point out the relationship between leadership styles, thinking styles and demographic variables. The papers consist in a survey conducted on 85 school leaders from 85 schools located in Malaysian state Perak and conclude that Malaysian school leaders practice open leadership and share power between school leaders and teachers. Another important finding of the questionnaire is that it rejects the proposal that leaders are purely born or purely made, because inborn qualities are not sufficient in order to perform as a leader, the qualities being determined by internal and external factors.

The question put by Boerma et al. (2017) is referring at the same subject as present paper but is presented different: 'Were they born this way or were they taught to lead?'. In the first part, with the help of a debate between two groups from the Academic Leadership Fellows Program they affirm that genetics has a great influence on the leader if the traits are fostered in the right environment, resulting in the conclusion that leaders are born, not made. After that, they made a parallel between a fish experiment and leadership concluding that born leaders tend to be more efficient than those that are put in the same position by force. Extending it to human leadership behaviour means that leadership is mostly born. Then, they spoke about counterpoint, stating that outstanding leaders are developed over time with hard work and experiences. Another counterpoint is provided by examples of leaders who were mentored, learned from their environment, and developed over time and through experience, such as Walt Disney or Roman Emperor Claudius Caesar Augustus. Ultimately, the paper emphasizes that the answer to the question lies in a combination of both factors.

The paper written by Adams et al. (2018) asks the question in only regarding if CEOs are born leaders, not if they are made. The research is based on 1.3 million men born between 1951−1978 and 26,000 of them served as CEOs. The personal traits discussed in the paper are cognitive ability, noncognitive ability and height. A favourable mix of these traits is not sufficient for making it to the executive suite; many of them having these skills but are not getting such a role within the company.

A different approach is offered by Avolio and Hannah (2020) who answer the question in the title with three different questions: 1) How much can leaders be developed?; 2) If leaders can be developed, how does it unfold and/or occur?; and 3) How does the readiness of the individual and organisation contribute to optimizing the full development of leadership? In the beginning of the paper, the authors state that 30% of a leader is born and the rest is made. Then, they put accent of early life experiences threw experience and parental influence, then explaining some types of development. Another important aspect mentioned in this article is learning goal orientation and a growing mind-set which should be possessed by the leader.

Klifto et al. (2024) offer a quick answer to the question with Vince Lombardi's quote that affirms 'Leaders are not born, they are made', offering the authors' opinions since the beginning. The article offers the method that was used to answer the question. The participants follow certain steps, and the results show that positive skills were identified that include enthusiasm, effective leadership behaviour, communication and organisation, dedicated, hard work and motivation, which shows the results of the process.

The question asked by Sposato (2024) is a different one: 'Are leaders born with innate qualities that propel them to greatness, or can effective leadership be developed through learning and experience?'. He affirms that some leaders have qualities, named natural gifts such as determination, eloquence, and ability to influence their employees and that some personality traits can influence traits such as risk-taking, resilience, and

cognitive abilities. In the second part of the paper the author speaks about leadership development in which different skills can be developed with the help of experience, education, environment and personal growth and requires continuous learning, self-reflection, and an openness to feedback. In the end, Sposato points out that a new meaning emerges for leadership, the interplay between born qualities and acquired skills.

The question asked in all papers offer an answer regarding the topic. Leaders are born with the abilities or inherit them, but they need experience, self-awareness, determination and influent people around them in order to become awakened leaders. Moreover, papers agree that leadership is shaped by both innate traits and learned experiences (Joan, 2009; Johnson et al. 1998; Sposato, 2024; Boerma et. Al, 2017), that leaders need continuous development and learning (Rowley, 1997; Sposato, 2024; Avolio & Hannah, 2020) and that traits contribute to leadership potential (Piaw & Ting, 2014).

Based on the analysis of these nine papers, the final conclusion is that leaders are both born and made, but the emphasis on development and experience is crucial. While some individuals may have inherent traits that predispose them to leadership roles, effective leadership is largely a learned skill that evolves through experience, training, self-awareness, and personal growth. In summary, while natural traits may provide a foundation, the skills and behaviours required for effective leadership are primarily developed and refined through life experiences, learning opportunities, and adaptive growth. Therefore, the question of whether leaders are born or made should be reframed as: leaders are born with potential, but they are made through continuous learning and development.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Given the above analysis, **the main objective of the paper** has been achieved and insights from papers asking whether leaders are born or made have been revealed. The nine research papers reviewed have nuanced conclusions which point to a combination of both inherent traits and experiential development in shaping effective leaders. While inherent traits play a role, the majority of the studies emphasize the importance of personal growth, experience, and development programs in shaping effective leaders. Leadership is seen as an evolving process, where individuals develop the necessary skills over time through learning from their experiences, feedback, training, and mentorship. All in all, it can be stated that leadership is significant, as leaders bear immense responsibility for addressing challenges that arise within the organization, and stakeholders have high expectations of them (Ulrich and Smallwood, 2012). Although leadership is not a concept that one is born with, but something that one develops, certain special characteristics or skills that are native and that one develops throughout live, are needed. In this sense, the difference between top leaders and casual leaders is the desire one has to become a successful leader. The abilities substantiated in this paper are used by leaders in order to carry out the daily tasks that help them to perform. Starting from the aspiration that helps a human being to become a leader, the analysis proves that individuals need to develop these abilities in order to become the true leaders that can lead top companies or their group.

This paper **managed to answer both research questions**. First, there was the debate surrounding whether leaders are born or made has been long-standing, with research offering evidence supporting both perspectives. From the studies reviewed, it is evident that leadership is not solely an inherent trait nor solely the result of training and development. Several studies, such as those by Johnson et al. (1998) and Boerma et al. (2017), suggest that while there may be genetic predispositions towards certain leadership traits, such as confidence, assertiveness, and social influence, the majority of leadership skills can indeed be developed over time. Avolio and Hannah (2020) highlight that leadership qualities are not static but evolve through experiences, education, and exposure to different environments. For instance, Piaw and Ting (2014) emphasize that school leaders in Malaysia develop their leadership styles over time, influenced by their personal experiences and formal training. Moreover, the study by Adams, Keloharju, and Knüpfer (2018) on CEOs suggests that while some traits—such as intelligence and decisiveness—may provide advantages in leadership roles, these traits alone are insufficient to guarantee success. Effective leadership emerges from a combination of intrinsic traits and external development, including mentorship, learning opportunities, and organizational experiences. In conclusion, while some individuals may have a natural predisposition for leadership, the overwhelming

evidence suggests that leadership is primarily a learned skill that can be cultivated through deliberate practice, feedback, and development.

Secondly there was the debate on the traits and skills that have consistently been identified across the reviewed literature as essential for the formation of effective leaders. These include both inherent qualities and skills that can be developed over time. Key traits identified in the literature include emotional intelligence, confidence, resilience, and adaptability. According to Sposato (2024), leaders with high emotional intelligence are more capable of managing relationships, navigating social complexities, and making decisions that positively impact their teams. Additionally, Joan (2009) argues that awakened leaders—those who are able to reflect on their experiences—tend to develop a deeper self-awareness, which is crucial for effective leadership. On the skills front, communication, decision-making, and strategic thinking are often mentioned as core competencies for leaders. The ability to inspire and motivate teams, as highlighted by Boerma et al. (2017), is also a key determinant of leadership success. Moreover, Sposato (2024) emphasizes the importance of continuous learning and adaptability, noting that effective leaders are those who are open to change and capable of fostering an environment that encourages innovation and development. Finally, leadership development programs, as seen in the research by Rowley (1997) and Piaw and Ting (2014), play a significant role in shaping effective leaders. These programs help to build critical skills and provide leaders with tools to manage teams, communicate effectively, and think strategically. In conclusion, effective leadership is shaped by a combination of inherent traits, such as emotional intelligence and confidence, and developed skills, including communication, decision-making, and strategic thinking. While some individuals may possess certain innate leadership qualities, these traits can be honed and refined through education, experience, and focused leadership development efforts.

Taking all these concluding remarks into consideration, one can state that the paper filled in the identified **research gap**, by synthesizing the existing literature on both perspectives and offering a comprehensive review that explores the interplay between innate characteristics and developmental factors in leadership.

This research, as any other review, has several **limitations**. Firstly, being limited to studies written in English, the review might be incomplete. Secondly, the exclusion of some types of documents from the analysis (reports, chapters, theses and others) or the bias created by the incapacity of retrieving some documents, might have the same influence of showing an incomplete picture of the studied topic. Thirdly, if the studies included in the review are of poor quality or have flaws regarding methodology, then the analysis will be as reliable as those studies. As for **future directions of research**, this review could focus on including more diverse groups within the initial search to ensure that findings are generalizable across different populations (men versus women for instance). Future research could explore how gender, race, and other forms of diversity interact with leadership development. Understanding whether leadership potential is equally accessible across different demographic groups could inform the creation of more inclusive leadership programs. Further studies could focus on how diverse leadership pathways differ for men and women, and for individuals from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. Another potential research direction could focus on how generational differences affect leadership styles and whether leadership is more likely to be "born" or "made" within different generational contexts (e.g., Baby Boomers vs. Millennials vs. Gen Z). As new generations enter the workforce with different values and expectations, understanding how leadership traits and expectations evolve is crucial. Last, as organizations increasingly rely on remote and virtual teams, future research could explore how leadership is developed and manifested in digital environments. Research could investigate whether traditional models of leadership are still applicable in virtual settings or if new skills and characteristics are required for effective leadership in an increasingly digital world.

REFERENCES

Adams, R., Keloharju, M., & Knüpfer, S. (2018). Are CEOs born leaders? Lessons from traits of a million individuals. *Journal of Financial Economics, 130*(2), 392-408. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfineco.2018.07.006

Aromataris, E., & Pearson, A. (2014). The systematic review: an overview. *AJN The American Journal of Nursing, 114*(3), 53-58. https://doi.org/10.1097/01.NAJ.0000444496.24228.2c

Avolio, B. J., & Hannah, S. T. (2020). An enduring leadership myth: Born a leader or made a leader?, *Organizational Dynamics, 49*(4), 100730. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2019.08.002

Awodun, M., & Ajia, A. (2012). Leaders are Born and Made, chapter in *STATECRAFT* Laying the Foundation for Modern Development, 233-267, Kwara State University Press.

Bertocci, D. I. (2009). *Leadership in organizations: There is a difference between leaders and managers*. University Press of America.

Boerma, M., Coyle, E. A., Dietrich, M. A., Dintzner, M. R., Drayton, S. J., Early II, J. L., Edginton, A. N., Horlen, C. K., Kirkwood, C. K., Lin, A. Y. F., Rager, M. L., Shah-Manek, B., Welch, A. C., & Williams, N. T. (2017). Point/counterpoint: Are outstanding leaders born or made? *American journal of pharmaceutical education, 81*(3), 58. https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe81358

Bolden, R. (2004). What is leadership? Centre for Leadership Studies, University of Exeter.

Bradberry, T., & Greaves, J. (2012). *Leadership 2.0.* TalentSmart.

Day, D. V. (2000). Leadership development: A review in context. *The leadership quarterly, 11*(4), 581-613. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(00)00061-8

DePree, M. (1998). *Leading organizations: Perspectives for a new era*, chapter What is leadership, 130-132, Sage publishing.

Farrús, M. (2023). Automatic Speech Recognition in L2 Learning: A Review Based on PRISMA Methodology. *Languages*, *8*(4), 242. https://doi.org/10.3390/languages8040242

Fiedler, F. E. (1981). Leadership Effectiveness. *American Behavioral Scientist, 24*(5), 619–632. https://doi.org/10.1177/000276428102400503

Hogan, R., & Kaiser, R. B. (2005). What we know about leadership. *Review of General Psychology, 9*(2), 169-180. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.9.2.169

Hughes, R. (2009). Time for leadership development interventions in the public health nutrition workforce. *Public health nutrition, 12*(8), 1029-1029. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980009990395

Joan F. M. (2009). Awakened leaders: born or made? *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 31*(4), 307-323. https://doi.org/10.1108/01437731011043339

Johnson, A. M., Vernon, P. A., McCarthy, J. M., Molson, M., Harris, J. A., & Jang, K. L. (1998). Nature vs nurture: Are leaders born or made? A behavior genetic investigation of leadership style, *Twin Research and Human Genetics, 1*(4), 216-223. https://doi.org/10.1375/136905298320566195

Klifto, C. S., Cheung, E. V., Holcomb, J. O., Frankle, M. A., Duralde, X. A., MacDonald, P. B., ... & Wright, M. (2024). Are leaders born to lead, or are they made?, *Journal of shoulder and elbow surgery, 33*(3), 531-535. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jse.2023.08.020

Marques, J. F. (2010). Awakened leaders: born or made? *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 31*(4), 307-323. https://doi.org/10.1108/01437731011043339

McCall, M. W. (2004). Leadership development through experience. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 18*(3), 127–130. https://doi.org/10.5465/ame.2004.14776183

Mishra, M., & Pandey, A. (2019). The impact of leadership styles on knowledge-sharing behaviour: a review of literature. *Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal, 33*(1), 16-19. https://doi.org/10.1108/DLO-06-2018-0067

Nanjundeswaraswamy, T. S., & Swamy, D. R. (2014). Leadership styles. *Advances in management, 7*(2), 57-62

Negruşa, A. L., & Cristică, M. (2024). Exploring gender disparities in leadership styles within the hotel industry. *Management Research and Practice, 16*(4), 5-17.

Page, M.J., McKenzie, J.E., Bossuyt, P.M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T.C., Mulrow, C. D., ... & Moher, D. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ, 372*(71), https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71.

Păcesilă, M., & Ciocoiu, C. N. (2017). Systematic literature review on eco-innovation determinants. *Management Research and Practice, 9*(3), 30-44.

Penttilä, S. (2021). *Leadership: Are Leaders Born or Made?* Retrieved from https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2021120623958

Piaw, C. Y., & Ting, L. L. (2014). Are school leaders born or made? Examining factors of leadership styles of Malaysian school leaders. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 116*, 5120-5124. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.1084

Pollock, A., & Berge, E. (2018). How to do a systematic review. *International Journal of Stroke, 13*(2), 138–156. https://doi.org/10.1177/1747493017743796

Radu, C., Deaconu, A., & Frasineanu, C. (2017). Leadership and gender differences: Are men and women leading in the same way. *Contemporary leadership challenges*, 63-81. https://dx.doi.org/10.5772/65774

Rowley, J. (1997). Academic leaders: made or born? *Industrial and commercial Training, 29*(3), 78-84. https://doi.org/10.1108/00197859710165065

Sadler, P. (2003). *Leadership* (2nd ed). Kogan Page Limited

Schramm, F., & Peter, B. (2005). Open and closed organization. *International Human Resource Management*, 2-21.

Silva, A (2016). What is Leadership? *Journal of Business Studies Quarterly, 8*(1), 1-5.

Sposato, M. (2024). Are leaders born or made? Asking the right question. *Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal, 38*(3), 1-3. https://doi.org/10.1108/DLO-05-2023-0123

Swaroop, K. R., & Prasad, N. G. A. (2013). Are leaders born or made? *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing & Management Review, 2*(8), 35-40

Ulrich, D., & Smallwood, N. (2012). What is leadership? *Advances in global leadership*, 7, 9-36, https://doi.org/10.1108/S1535-1203(2012)0000007005

Vasile, C. M. (2014). Femei vs. bărbaţi în leadership „Glasul inimii" vs. „Glasul minţii", ECOSTUDENT - *Revistă de cercetare ştiinţifică a studenţilor economişti, 3*, 60-67