Thought Leadership on the Revolutionary Developments in Organizations

Ursula Brady
Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi

Kathy Kuria
Kuria Consulting, LLC

Reginald L. Bell
Prairie View A&M University

This study investigated thought leadership concerning organizational growth strategies. Internal Thought Leaders (ITL) and External Thought Leaders (ETL) we identified in the literature to be directly related to achieving revolutionary developments in organizations (RDO). We found that ITL are better suited for setting goals, aligning resources, and fostering innovations; on the other hand, ETL were better suited to advance organizational reputation. We explicate a progressive thought leadership framework that works best to sustain organizational growth strategies. This integrative approach can impact ethical decision-making, leadership styles, operation efficiencies and return on investments if done properly. Because thought leadership influences a collective mindset among workers, we were able to make several recommendations for managers seeking to influence their organizational growth strategies.

Keywords: decision-making, Descartes, ethics, growth, influence, strategy, thinking, thought leadership

INTRODUCTION TO THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Did Rene Descartes disprove his own thoughts?

> *"No, René Descartes did not disprove his own thoughts; in fact, his famous philosophical statement "Cogito, ergo sum" (I think, therefore, I am) is based on the idea that the very act of doubting one's own existence proves that one must exist as a thinking thing, making it the one undeniable truth he could establish through his method of radical doubt"* (Google AI, generated on November 29, 2024).

Rene Descartes, inventor of Analytical Geometry, was perhaps made more famous when he attempted to disprove his own beliefs with a form of rationalism explicated in his book, *A Discourse on the Method of Correctly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, with the credo "Cogito, ergo sum" [I think; therefore, I am] (Descartes, 2006). What is clear is that when you are doubting what you are thinking, you are existing. Descartes (2006) establishes thinking to be clarified from existing, as doubting your thoughts proves your existence, demonstrated in the following passage from Descartes' book:

I am thinking therefore I exist: the Latin version reads cogito ergo sum, which is normally translated as 'I think therefore I am'; but the glosses that Descartes places on this elsewhere (notably in the second parts of the Principia and the Meditations) make it clear both that it is a performative ('I am thinking') and that being is existing; he is not referring to being as essence…'it is contradictory to suppose that what is thinking does not, at the very time when it is thinking, exist.' Two other points emerge from this passage: the first step towards the cogito is the dubio ('I am doubting, therefore I am existing'); and the immediacy of this intuition is not consistent with the view expressed by other Renaissance figures who consider reflexive thinking, such as Cardano, who see a time interval elapsing between the thought and the realization that the thought is being thought… (Descartes, 2006, pp. 73-74)

Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary (2024) defines *thought* as "*an individual act or product of thinking*." It further defines *thinking* as "*using one's mind to produce thoughts*." Thought is a noun, while thinking is a verb. Thought leaders are thinking beings whose ideas of mind affect the thought patterns and actions of others. There are the capitalist philosophers whose books are considered the most influential management books of the 20th Century, which laid the groundwork for the field of management, i.e., Taylor, Fayol, Weber, Drucker, Simon, Follett, Herzberg, Barnard, Porter, and others (Bedeian & Wren, 2001; Bell & Roebuck, 2015; Fulk, et al, 2011; Gabor, 2000). Many corporate executives were heavily influenced by management by objectives found in *The Practice of Management* (Drucker, 2012). *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities and Practices,* in a book review Woolsey (1975) considered it to be the bible of management philosophy. Chester I. Barnard, Herbert Simon, Frederick W. Taylor, Max Weber, Henri Fayol are good examples of thought leaders.

Thought leadership often refers to the position of an individual or an organization as an expert in a specific field. The concept of thought leadership advocates for a novel idea that instigates change via rational argument, empirical evidence, and motivational appeal (Rausch & McCrimmon, 2005), as cited in Wen et al., (2019). By highlighting the relative impacts of *Internal Thought Leaders* (ITL) and *External Thought Leaders* (ETL) on different organizational outcomes, this study illuminates the unique contributions and potential synergies between internal thought leadership and external thought leadership in driving revolutionary developments in organizations (RDO). When it comes to internal thought leaders, the focus is specifically on examining and optimizing factors within the organization itself as it pertains to strategic thinking. Conway (2013, p.4) established the following:

Strategic thinking is identifying, imagining, and understanding possible and plausible alternative futures for your organisation, and using the knowledge gained to strengthen your thinking about your potential options to position your organisation effectively in the external environment in the future, in order to make better informed and more robust decisions about action to take today.

With rapidly evolving markets, revolutionary development increasingly depends on leaders who can manage internal complexities and build external influence. However, the specific impact of internal vs. external leadership approaches on organizational growth strategies remains underexplored with a perceived gap in literature. It is unclear to what extent internal and external thought leadership influence growth separately. Additionally, organizations may under-prioritize one in favor of the other, which could limit growth potential. A comprehensive literature review comparing the two aspects of leadership is necessary. We will explore both concepts—internal and external thought leadership, assessing how these ideas contribute exclusively to RDOs. Strategic thinking is a crucial skill for RDO, involving the ability to analyze complex situations, communicate throughout the organization at each tier, identify opportunities, and formulate innovative solutions, including the five-forces of industry competitiveness (Bell, 2012; Porter, 2008). To examine the impact of internal and external thought leadership on growth strategies, we explore the concepts by answering the following research question:

RQ: Can internal and external thought leaders' influence on revolutionary developments in organizations as growth strategies be properly identified and measured?

The discourse on leadership impact on RDO has progressed markedly during the last few decades. Recent scholarship examined the convergence of ITL and ETL, acknowledging the distinct yet synergistic roles each contribute to organizational success. This review initiates with an analysis of historical viewpoints on leadership, ranging from first trait-based ideas to more sophisticated methodologies. Contemporary leadership paradigms prioritizing authenticity, integrity, and ethical decision-making are examined. The review finishes by emphasizing secondary evidence as proof that illustrates the concrete effects of different leadership styles on RDO and growth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Liedtka (1998) identified five key elements that characterize strategic thinking: 1) taking a systems (holistic) view, 2) maintaining a clear focus on intent, 3) thinking in time (considering past, present and future), 4) being hypothesis-driven, and 5) remaining intelligently opportunistic. These elements enable strategic thinkers to see the big picture, stay focused on goals, learn from history while anticipating the future, test assumptions, and remain flexible enough to seize unexpected opportunities. With an eye toward innovation, organizations utilize strategic thinking to focus on improvements and future endeavors (Haycock et al., 2012). Although strategic thinking has been recognized as critical to organizational success, there is a notable lack of research devoted to the exploration of the importance of strategic thinking in organizational success, there is a notable lack of comprehensive research exploring the factors that contribute to or precede strategic thinking (antecedents) and the results of strategic thinking (outcomes) (Moon, 2013). "*At a time when leaders across a spectrum of organizations are facing unprecedented socioeconomic challenges, strategic thinkers are much needed to rise to the occasion*" (Adzeh, 2017, p.11).

Impact on Ethical Decision-Making

Several factors influence ethical decision-making, including moral intensity, awareness, and ethical leadership. Jones's (1991) model posits that ethical decisions vary depending on the characteristics of the ethical issue, termed "moral intensity." This model includes factors such as the magnitude of consequences, social consensus, and probability of effect, which influence the ethical decision-making process. Moral intensity is critical in determining how individuals respond to ethical issues. This model highlights the importance of assessing an ethical dilemma's specific context and intensity to determine the appropriate response.

Butterfield et al. (2000) examine how organizational factors affect ethical decision-making, particularly the first stage of the process, which is moral awareness. It discusses how situational factors, organizational context, and issue-specific factors shape whether employees recognize ethical issues. Much like Jones' (1991) moral intensity, moral awareness is a critical step in ethical decision-making. Organizations can enhance ethical decision-making by fostering an environment that encourages employees to recognize and address ethical issues. Ethical decision-making in business is multi-faceted, with various personal and situational factors shaping ethical behavior. The study suggests that organizational frameworks that emphasize ethical values and culture effectively promote ethical decision-making.

The study from Brown, Trevino, and Harrison (2005) that was mentioned in the context of ethical leadership also provides empirical evidence that ethical leadership positively affects employee morale and organizational commitment, boosting organizational performance. It emphasizes that ethical leaders promote a trust-based culture, supporting internal cohesion and external reputation. While other studies explore how transactional and transformational leadership styles affect organizational learning and innovation. It demonstrates that transformational leadership fosters a culture of learning and creativity, directly contributing to growth (García-Morales et al., 2012).

The value of thought leadership is often met with skepticism and misconceptions. Harvey et al. (2021) posits that thought leadership is an inconsistent, universally recognized, but poorly understood concept.

The term "thought leader" dates to 1887, an often-used term that does not have a universally accepted meaning. More recently, the term was used in periodicals such as The Economist and MIT Technology Review to illustrate how industry leaders have greatly influenced how we view brands and societal issues (Barry & Gironda, 2019). Literature has referred to the concept as opinion leadership that employs novelty and expertise (Rogers & Cartano, 1962), allowing room to question the concept's legitimacy, and the lack of studies addressing thought leadership further exacerbates the issue of legitimacy. While thought leadership is appealing, it requires a nuanced balance of expertise, innovation, and influence to implement successfully.

Impact on Leadership Styles

Authentic leadership emphasizes self-awareness, transparency, ethical conduct, and commitment to personal growth. Avolio and Gardner (2005) argue that authentic leaders, who stay true to their values, are more effective at building trust and fostering long-term success. Authentic leadership has been linked to higher organizational commitment and trust. By modeling ethical behavior, authentic leaders create an environment of openness and integrity, positively influencing organizational culture.

In 1962, Rogers and Cartano wrote about "opinion leaders". In the context of their research, this concept is an intersection of both strategic leaders' thinking and thought leadership. The writers theorize that personal influence is "*an essential ingredient in many different type of decision-making*" (Rogers & Cartano, 1962, p. 436) Their findings show that those opinion leaders of the time held more sway over decision making in things like adoption of farm equipment, far outweighing the more detached sources of information available like radio or farm periodicals. Their measurements of opinion leaders' influence showed their more sophisticated methods of communication to reach the heights of innovation that could facilitate organizational growth. Thought leadership effectiveness includes being keen on emotional intelligence within a managerial communication environment and being properly trained, as effective leaders are trained not born (Brown, et al, 2023; Chatman, et al 2020; Nguyen, et al, 2019).

Burns (1978) offered a definition of transformative leadership that has seen a resurgence in contemporary articles on leadership diversity and integrity (Adams, et al, 2023; Cooper, et al, 2023): Bell and Bodie (2012), in summary of a leadership definition wrote:

> *Although there are many definitions of leadership, James MacGregor Burns (1978), in his classic b-book Leadership, provides a definition that is still relevant: "<u>Leadership is the reciprocal process of mobilizing, by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers</u>." Apparently Burns perceived the ideal leader as "transformational." Appealing to the followers' values and a higher vision, transformational leaders encourage the followers to exert themselves in the service of achieving that vision (p. 49–50).*

Kouzes and Posner (2017) establish their credibility as experts on leadership strategy through rigorous research, combining extensive empirical studies with practical insights that are not purely anecdotal. They base their proposition on data collected over decades (pp. 42-43); they analyzed thousands of leadership behaviors across varied environments and present clear patterns connecting credibility to effective leadership. Unlike anecdotal claims, their findings are supported by systematic evidence, including their "Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership" model (p.11). On the other hand, James MacGregor Burns (1978) provides a more theoretical foundation whose hallmark is transformational leadership: Kouzes and Posner complement this framework by offering actionable strategies validated through real-world application and broad surveys, reinforcing the claim with concrete, replicable data.

Fostering collaboration in this environment requires cultivating trust and breaking down silos of ideological division. Kouzes and Posner (2017) argue that leaders must "strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence" (p. 274). While their advice on empowering employees is valuable, it oversimplifies the complexity of ideological conflicts. The strategic thinker could go further by

initiating structured, facilitated dialogues that allow employees to voice their concerns and co-create guidelines for content moderation. Kouzes and Posner's notion that "collaboration thrives when people trust one another" (p. 236) is accurate but incomplete in this context. Trust must be actively built through transparent decision-making and acknowledgment of valid fears from both sides of the debate. By addressing these tensions head-on and reinforcing the organization's shared vision, strategic thinkers will lay the foundation for long-term collaboration and unity.

Liedtka (1998) recognized the need to create a capability for strategic thinking at multiple organizational levels has increasingly been recognized as central to creating and sustaining competitive advantage in the face of the rapid environmental change that characterizes many business environments today. In addition, Fiedler's contingency theory posits that there is no one best way to lead; instead, the effectiveness of a leadership style depends on situational factors. Leaders may be more effective if their style matches the demands of the situation, such as task structure, leader-member relations, and leader position power. Leadership is dynamic and must adapt to different contexts, a significant departure from earlier trait and behavioral theories. It has become a cornerstone for understanding adaptive leadership. (Gawronski, 2021)

Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) examine servant leadership and transformational leadership to present a balanced approach that emphasizes service to employees while inspiring and motivating them. By integrating both leadership styles, leaders can create a supportive environment that drives high performance. Integrating servant and transformational leadership builds a culture of trust and high morale while aligning employees with organizational goals. This combination helps balance the focus on employee well-being and organizational productivity. Leaders using this approach adapt their style to support creativity and operational control.

Ambidextrous leadership allows organizations to be innovative while maintaining stability. Leaders who adaptively switch between encouraging exploration and enforcing discipline create an environment that supports sustained growth and resilience. This take on leadership also allows organizations to be innovative while maintaining stability. Leaders who adaptively switch between encouraging exploration and enforcing discipline create an environment that supports sustained growth and resilience. (Rosing et al., 2011)

Koçak (2019) theorized that the globalization occurring in business dynamics has created new challenges leading to the need for a change from conventional leadership. Challenges also uniquely create opportunities for leaders to innovate and adapt. Leaders with an eye toward new thinking and ideas that extend beyond the bottom line can garner more than the bottom dollar. These modern approaches to balanced leadership focus on adapting leadership styles to meet various organizational needs, fostering inclusivity, sustainability, and ethical responsibility. By integrating elements of transformational, transactional, servant, and ethical leadership, modern leaders can create a balanced environment that drives both innovation and stability, making these approaches particularly relevant in today's dynamic and diverse organizational landscapes.

Impact on Operations and Investment Returns

One study empirically examines how CEO leadership style impacts organizational performance, particularly under uncertain environmental conditions. It focuses on directive and empowering leadership styles, showing that leaders who adapt their style to the organization's environment are more likely to foster growth. The study finds that empowering leadership correlates with profitability and growth, especially in uncertain environments where adaptability and employee autonomy are crucial (Waldman et al., 2001).

Jansen et al (2009) explore how leaders who balance exploration and innovation with exploitation and efficiency to foster organizational growth in dynamic environments. The study empirically examines companies in fast-changing industries and finds that leaders who support a dual approach of innovation and efficiency drive stronger growth. They found that strategic leaders who emphasize both innovation and operational efficiency are more successful in achieving sustained growth, particularly in rapidly changing markets.

Historical and modern leadership underscores the pivotal role of adaptability, ethical conduct, and strategic balance in shaping organizational growth and culture. From Rogers and Cartano's (1962) concept of opinion leaders to Fiedler's contingency theory, effective leadership is shown to depend on context and situational demands. As emphasized by Avolio and Gardner (2005), authentic leadership highlights the importance of trust, transparency, and ethical integrity for fostering long-term success. Modern approaches, such as ambidextrous, servant, and transformational leadership, demonstrate the need to integrate innovation with operational stability while addressing ethical responsibilities. Empirical studies validate the significant impact of leadership styles, showing how empowering and ethical leaders foster trust, creativity, and sustained performance. As organizations face increasing complexity, leaders who blend traditional insights with modern strategies, emphasizing ethical decision-making, innovation, and employee well-being, are better equipped to drive resilience and long-term success in dynamic environments.

Strategic thinking profoundly influences organizational operations by shaping long-term direction, improving resource allocation, and enhancing adaptability to changing environments. It fosters a culture of innovation and ensures that daily activities align with overarching strategic objectives, leading to more coherent and effective operations. Strategic thinking encourages cross-functional collaboration and drives competitive advantage by promoting informed decision-making and comprehensive problem-solving. Additionally, it facilitates change management and strengthens risk management capabilities, enabling organizations to navigate uncertainties and capitalize on emerging opportunities. Ultimately, integrating strategic thinking into operations enhances agility, resilience, and overall organizational performance.

The Reach of Thought Leaders

The reach of these thought leaders can be measured in many ways but is often gauged by their publication volumes, types, and positions. Thought leaders with numerous publications (especially a mix of books and other works) will likely have a more substantial and varied reach, influencing academic and professional communities. Those who focus heavily on books may have a concentrated influence in specific areas but can still reach a broad audience, especially in practice-oriented fields. Table 1 highlights 25 leaders ranked by *Thinkers50* in 2023, showing how different publishing strategies (academic articles versus books) align with each thought leader's role and influence strategy. Professors dominate in academic spaces, while practitioners leverage books to build reputations and influence broader professional audiences.

Thought leadership is used by leadership as a strategic tool to position individuals or firms as experts in their field. Professional service firms (PFSs), which require special training and provide specialized services, are often viewed as thought leaders (Harvey et al., 2021). These knowledge-intensive organizations employ professionals who possess the specialized skills to provide customized solutions to clients. These solutions further solidify the entity's perception as a thought leader. The differences between traditional and thought leadership can be crystallized by focusing on authority, trust, and credibility over direct conversion metrics (Barry & Gironda, 2019). The authors found that when information is shared, trust is fostered, which is a crucial attribute in assessing the quality of thought leadership.

Strategic thinking in modern organizations necessitates cognitive flexibility and adaptability, emphasizing the importance of creativity and novel connections. It marks a crucial shift from reactive to initiative-taking thinking, focusing on long-term, future-oriented perspectives. Adzeh (2017, p.1) notes that strategic thinking is imperative for strategic leadership and planning to occur. Strategic thinking recognizes uncertainty as a dominant factor in contemporary business environments, requiring leaders to cultivate a mindset that embraces complexity and change rather than adhering to outdated, stability-oriented paradigms (Haycock, 2012). Moon (2012) further defines strategic thinking as addressing strategic issues, blending a creative and atypical thought process with a logical and traditional approach to find novel strategies for competing and adding value for customers.

TABLE 1
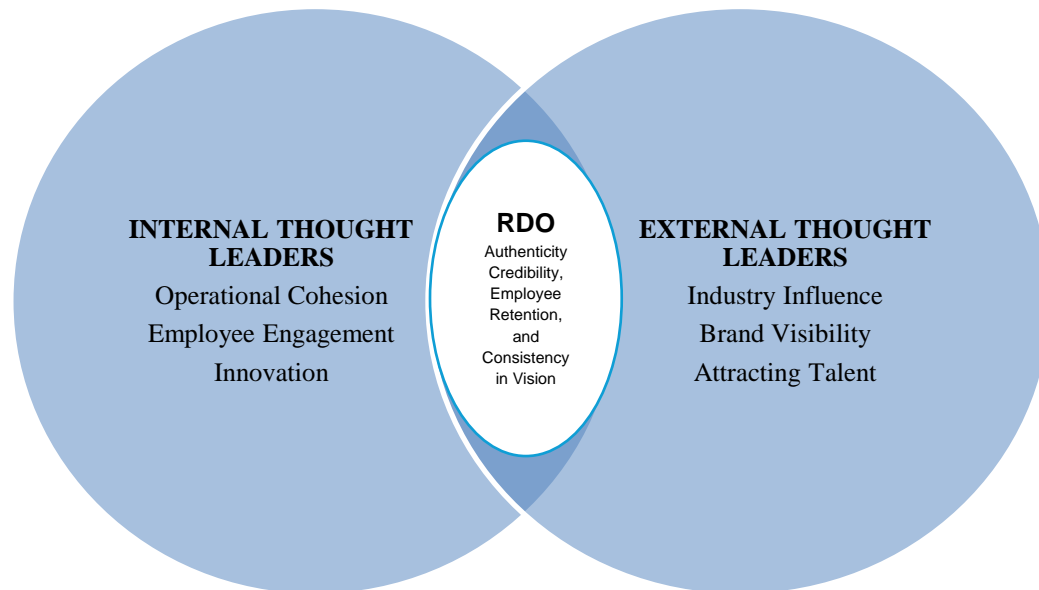## THOUGHT LEADERS RANKED BY THINKER50 BASED ON INFLUENCE

Rank	Thought Leader	AGE	Position	Books	Other Publications
1	Amy C. Edmondson	65	Professor	6	368
7	Rita McGrath	65	Professor	6	202
9	Scott D. Anthony	49	Professor	9	176
10	Tsedal Neeley	50	Professor	11	89
11	Marshall van Alstyne	62	Professor	2	266
11	Geoff Parker	60	Faculty Director	6	157
12	Sinan Aral	39	Professor	4	105
13	Rachel Botsman	46	Trust Fellow	7	32
14	Tiffani Bova	57	Growth Strategist	4	0
15	Erik Brynjolfsson	62	Professor	8	683
15	Andrew McAfee	56	Principle Researcher	12	174
16	Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic	48	Chief Innovation Officer	9	272
18	Dorie Clark	46	Marketing Strategy Consultant	10	25
19	Susan David	54	Psychologist	10	
20	Erica Dhawan	40	Speaker	6	2
21	Kirstin Ferguson	51	Director	2	208
22	Frances Frei	61	Professor	3	84
22	Anne Morriss	45	Leadership Coach	3	4
23	Heidi K. Gardner	50	CEO	8	100
24	Heidi Grant	51	Chief Science Officer	18	5
30	Herminia Ibarra	63	Professor	8	46
32	Whitney Johnson	42	CEO	6	0
35	Roger L. Martin	68	Professor	10	209
37	Erin Meyer	53	Professor	10	35
48	Zeynep Ton	36	Professor	3	12

The Strategic Intersection of ETL and ITL on RDO

Figure 1 shows the intersection of ITL and ETL working hand in hand to help with RDO. The leader's strategic thinking leads to concepts that foster thought leadership. Satya Nadella became CEO of Microsoft in 2014, and recognizing the shift to cloud-based computing trends, decided to pivot Microsoft's strategy. Strategic thinking positioned Microsoft as a thought leader in technology and services (The Economist, 2020). To identify and measure the real benefits of thought leadership, organizations can employ several metrics such as key performance indicators KPI(s), tracking credibility, business impact in sales or client engagement and retention, audience perception, talent attraction, and retention (Harvey et al., 2021).

> *"Thought leadership requires the ability to go beyond a single context to understand the integrative components of knowledge within and beyond a single organization. Moreover, it often touches on inherently messy, tension-fueled topics, and evading resolution"* (Harvey et al., 2021).

INTERNAL THOUGHT LEADERS

Operational Cohesion

Employee Engagement

Innovation

RDO
Authenticity Credibility, Employee Retention, and Consistency in Vision

EXTERNAL THOUGHT LEADERS

Industry Influence

Brand Visibility

Attracting Talent

Barry and Gironda (2019) found a direct correlation between thought leadership competency and the marketer's ability to stimulate conversation related to a product. The real benefits of thought leadership include trust in leadership and authority, employee engagement, and talent attraction and retention (Kiyatkin et al., 2011). Transformational leadership correlates positively with organizational growth metrics such as revenue and market share, especially when leaders create a supportive and innovative environment. This leadership style enhances growth by fostering a culture of learning and innovation, while transactional leadership is better suited for achieving efficiency and short-term goals. Servant leadership correlates with long-term organizational growth and stability, especially in companies where employee satisfaction and retention are central to the business model.

Empowering leadership styles positively correlate with organizational success, particularly in dynamic environments. By fostering employee autonomy, collaboration, and knowledge sharing, these leaders drive innovation, enhance team performance, and promote adaptability. Strategic leaders who emphasize both innovation and operational efficiency are especially effective in achieving sustained growth and profitability in rapidly evolving markets. This approach proves crucial in uncertain business landscapes where flexibility and quick decision-making are essential for maintaining a competitive edge.

Research Questioned Answered

RQ: Can internal and external thought leaders' influence on revolutionary developments in organizations as growth strategies be properly identified and measured?

Answer: Yes, internal and external thought leaders' influence on revolutionary developments in organizations as growth strategies can be properly identified and measured. While ITL is crucial for organizational direction and immediate to medium-term challenges, ETL has a longer-term vision and a wider reach, potentially influencing the entire industry. Both approaches require different skill sets and characteristics, with internal thought leadership demanding critical thinking and decision-making skills, while external thought leadership requires persuasive communication skills and deep domain expertise. Ultimately, both are important for organizational success, operating on different scales and with distinct primary objectives.

AN INTERNAL TO EXTERNAL THOUGHT LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Figure 2 shows the progression hierarchy from ITL to ETL using concepts from the literature. The cognitive processes and decision-making approaches involved in an organization's growth, operations, and return on investment will also be explored. The utility of thought leadership will then be explored, highlighting its use as a strategic tool to position firms or individuals as experts in a particular field. This expertise is conventionally demonstrated by the thought leaders' public communications, industry contributions, and influence on stakeholders through content analysis of published materials. Socorro et al (2021) discuss how thought leadership spawns disruptive thinking and creative destruction, as catalysts for change.

FIGURE 2
THOUGHT LEADERSHIP HIERARCHY: AN ITL TO ETL FRAMEWORK
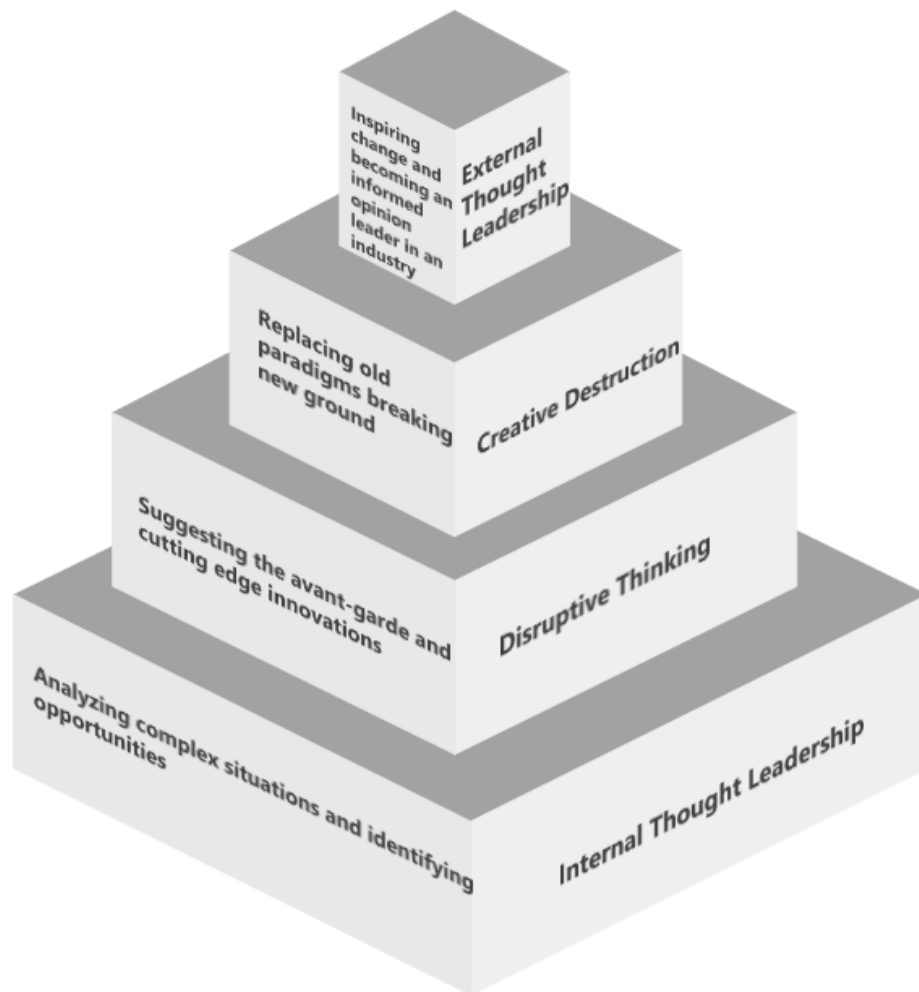
ITL Analysis of Complex Situations by Identifying Opportunities

ITL focuses on analyzing complex situations and identifying opportunities as a powerful strategy for driving organizational innovation and growth. This approach leverages the expertise and insights of employees to tackle challenging problems and uncover new possibilities. Manz and Neck (1991), Bojesson and Fundin (2021), and Rune Todnem By (2021) all provide distinct yet complementary perspectives on leadership, emphasizing self-awareness, collaboration, and purpose. To effectively analyze and overcome

complex situations, organizations must first identify those employees with the knowledge and expertise required to tackle the problem. A decade later, Manz and Neck (1991) emphasize the concept of inner leadership, underscoring the significance of self-management and developing constructive thought patterns to maximize personal potential and improve leadership effectiveness. On the other hand, Bojesson and Fundin (2021) examine the micro foundations of dynamic capabilities, emphasizing the role of individual behaviors, team dynamics, and organizational structures in driving successful organizational change, with a strong focus on overcoming barriers and leveraging enablers. By (2021) shifts the lens to purpose-driven leadership, advocating for leadership as a collective responsibility centered on a clearly defined and meaningful purpose, guided by intrinsic values that benefit the greater good. While Manz and Neck (1991) prioritize internal self-regulation and Bojesson and Fundin (2021) focus on the interplay of micro-level actions within organizational contexts, By (2021) extends the discourse to emphasize leadership as a shared endeavor oriented toward societal impact. Together, these perspectives offer a holistic view, connecting leadership's personal, organizational, and societal dimensions. Organizations can tap into a wealth of knowledge and creativity by empowering internal thought leaders to analyze complex situations and identify opportunities. This approach not only drives innovation but also enhances employee engagement and creates a culture of continuous improvement

Disruptive Thinking by Suggesting Innovations

ITL is vital in challenging conventional thinking by introducing innovation within organizations. Within a culture that encourages novel problem-solving and progressive thinking, ITL may catalyze notable change and creativity. King and Baatartogtokh (2015), Kumaraswamy, Garud, and Ansari (2018), and Yu and Hang (2010) provide distinct yet interconnected critiques and expansions of Clayton Christensen's Disruptive Innovation Theory, each addressing its limitations and potential applications. The theory, introduced in 1997 (Christensen et al., 2018), explains how less-resourced organizations challenge and potentially displace larger, more established institutions by innovating and serving niche or emerging markets. King and Baatartogtokh critically assess Christensen's theory using 77 cases, highlighting that many do not align with its core principles, such as entrants consistently starting in niche markets or incumbents ignoring them. They argue for a more nuanced framework incorporating other strategic models (King & Baatartogtokh, 2015). Kumaraswamy, et al. (2018) expand the scope by introducing evolutionary, relational, temporal, and framing perspectives, emphasizing the emergent and multifaceted nature of disruption, and advocating for stakeholder-driven interpretations to shape outcomes (Kumaraswamy et al., 2018). Yu and Hang (2010) focus on clarifying ambiguities in the theory, distinguishing it from other innovations, and exploring enablers like organizational culture while critiquing its predictive reliability due to contextual variations (Yu & Hang, 2010). Together, these works highlight the complexity and adaptability required to understand and apply disruptive innovation, from the limitations of Christensen's original framework to the importance of contextual and systemic factors in dynamic environments.

Creative Destruction by Replacing Old Paradigms

Creative destruction involves breaking down established norms, introducing innovation, and embracing chaos, at least temporarily, to evolve and grow. Erica Avrami's application of creative destruction in cultural heritage and Joseph Schumpeter's Growth Paradigm both center on the transformative power of innovation, but they apply it in distinct contexts with varying goals and implications. Avrami (2021, p. 45) emphasizes that creative destruction in heritage management involves the deliberate transformation or removal of outdated sites to foster inclusivity and sustainability in response to modern challenges like climate change and systemic exclusion. In her view, transformational leadership is critical in aligning heritage practices with evolving societal values, making conservation a proactive and socially responsive endeavor. Conversely, the Schumpeterian Growth Paradigm (Schumpeter, 1942) frames creative destruction as an economic process where innovation continuously replaces outdated technologies and business models, driving sustained economic development. While Avrami focuses on cultural and societal advancement through adaptive leadership and equitable development, Schumpeter highlights the entrepreneurial dynamics that disrupt industries to achieve economic growth. Both perspectives underscore

innovation's dual role in dismantling the old and paving the way for progress, but Avrami integrates a more socially conscious lens, whereas Schumpeter emphasizes market-driven efficiency and productivity.

ETL Inspiring Change by Opinion Leadership

Opinion leaders, those who influence the opinions, motivations and behaviors of others, disseminate information to others within a community or organization (Valente & Pumpuang, 2007). These individuals are held in high esteem and have broad reach. ETLs use opinion leadership to inspire change outside of organizations by introducing new ideas and influencing established perceptions. Hassan Elsan Mansaray's (2019) exploration of diverse leadership styles and their influence on organizational change management contrasts with the more focused lens on transformational leadership and dynamic capabilities in the broader literature. Mansaray highlights the versatility required of leaders, emphasizing that different styles— including transformational, authoritarian, democratic, and participative leadership—can be effective depending on the organizational context and challenges faced during transitions. In contrast, the literature on transformational leadership (e.g., Smith, 2020) focuses on inspiring and motivating employees to foster innovation, adaptability, and dynamic capabilities, which are crucial for navigating market volatility. Mansaray emphasizes the need to adapt across leadership styles to remain competitive in the market. However, research indicates that organizations that embrace transformational leadership have a greater capacity to identify, seize, and reconfigure opportunities, thereby fostering eco-innovation and long-term performance. Both perspectives converge on the importance of leadership in driving change and competitiveness but diverge in their emphasis, with Mansaray advocating for situational flexibility and transformational leadership literature focusing on the sustained benefits of a singular, innovation-driven style.

CONCLUSION

Ethical leadership drives organizational success through improved employee satisfaction, reduced turnover, and enhanced public perception leading to RDO. Leaders shape the ethical climate, setting standards and fostering a supportive culture for addressing complex dilemmas. Moral intensity influences individual responses to ethical issues, emphasizing the importance of context-specific assessments. A virtue-based approach, focusing on moral character development, is particularly effective for long-term decision-making aligned with organizational values. Ultimately, ethical behavior results from the interplay of individual values, organizational culture, and situational factors, highlighting the complexity of ethical decision-making in professional settings.

ITL and ETL are distinct yet complementary approaches organizations can leverage for success. Internal thought leadership focuses on organizational strategy, resource allocation, and decision-making within a 3–5-year outlook. It aims to anticipate changes, align internal resources, and drive critical thinking for organizational benefit, primarily impacting internal stakeholders and organizational culture. In contrast, external thought leadership extends beyond the organization's boundaries, aiming to influence industry trends, shape debates, and build brand reputation. It involves generating and disseminating innovative ideas, often addressing broader, long-term issues in the industry. Based on our findings and review of the literature, we can recommend the following solutions.

ITL Recommendations

Internal thought leadership demands critical thinking and decision-making skills. It is crucial for crafting strategy, organizational direction, problem-solving, change adaptation, scenario planning, and align structures with vision, and resolving immediate to medium-term challenges. Effective ITL foster sharing expertise and encouraging innovation within organizations(Kerns, Charles, 2019). By nurturing ITL, organizations can boost employee engagement and performance while remaining competitive in an ever-changing environment. Internal thought leadership should not be limited to top leadership but cultivated throughout all organizational levels.

The First ITL recommendation is to invest in staff development at all levels, not just senior leadership. Further, organizations should utilize scenario planning, address technological challenges, align organizational practices, cultivate open-mindedness, and create opportunities for experimentation. Organizations can enhance their innovation, adaptability, and value creation by developing these capabilities in a dynamic environment.

The Second ITL recommendation is to analyze resource distribution (time, budget, personnel) for each. Evaluate internal thought leadership ROI through metrics like decision-making quality, operational efficiency, innovation, and long-term financial performance. Assess external thought leadership ROI via brand reputation, lead generation, sales opportunities, and revenue growth. This comparison provides insights into the relative effectiveness and value of investing in ITL versus ETL for driving RDO.

The Third ITL recommendation is to analyze organizational culture impact. Organizational culture is shaped by internal thought leadership, influencing decision-making processes, and aligning employees with goals, while external thought leadership primarily affects external perceptions but can also enhance employee pride and engagement, creating a dual impact on the organization's cultural dynamics.

ETL Recommendations

External thought leadership represents a departure from traditional, positional leadership. It involves championing innovative ideas and influence rather than managing people or helping a group achieve goals (McCrimmon, 2005). Unlike conventional leadership, external thought leadership is directed outward. It does not involve enabling or managing teams to achieve tasks (McCrimmon, 2005). ETL, possessing persuasive communication, has a reach that influences an entire industry. Based on our findings and literature review, we can recommend three solutions.

The First ETL recommendation is to engage in and contribute to international conferences to enhance audience engagement and expand reach. Positioning as a speaker at prominent events establishes the organization and the individual as authorities in the field. The engagements enhance the speaker's stature and create an opportunity to present a novel viewpoint on disruptive activities. Attendance facilitates networking and offers a venue to engage possible collaborators and shape industry discussions. Organizations can substantially improve their standing and remain at the front of transformative advancements by utilizing conferences.

The Second ETL recommendation is to partner with academic institutions and research organizations on joint research initiatives, executive education programs and advisory boards. Executive education programs provide an opportunity for executives seeking to deepen their understanding of methods intended to enhance organizational design and strategies. ETL are uniquely equipped to insight and guidance to entities seeking to revolutionize their organizations. By partnering with recognized authorities, ETL can co-author publications such as whitepapers, research reports, and case studies that offer valuable insights into transformative practices. These collaborative efforts not only leverage combined expertise but also lend credibility to the content.

The Third ETL recommendation is to publish articles and share insights via blogs and forums. Thought leadership articles in business magazines and online platforms reach broader audiences. Participating in podcasts, interviews and contributing to industry blogs aid in establishing authority in a particular industry. This multimedia approach allows ETL to reach a broader audience and present complex ideas in an accessible format.

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