OPEN ACCESS

Saudi Journal of Business and Management Studies
Abbreviated Key Title: Saudi J Bus Manag Stud
ISSN 2415-6663 (Print) |ISSN 2415-6671 (Online)
Scholars Middle East Publishers, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Journal homepage: https://saudijournals.com

Original Research Article

Syncretic Leadership - The Genesis of a New Leadership Model for the AI Age and Global Multicultural Workforce in an Era of Continuous Change

Dr. Dan Paiuc[1]*
[1]Center for Research in Management (CRM) within the Faculty of Management of the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania

DOI: https://doi.org/10.36348/sjbms.2025.v10i08.005 | **Received:** 20.07.2025 | **Accepted:** 17.09.2025 | **Published:** 20.09.2025

***Corresponding author:** Dr. Dan Paiuc
Center for Research in Management (CRM) within the Faculty of Management of the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract

In the context of prompt and imminent digital acceleration and the rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI), leadership theory is shifting toward what this study defines as *Syncretic Leadership*. This emerging framework integrates and combines cognitive agility, algorithmic collaboration, and a culturally fused workforce as foundational attributes for navigating hybrid human-machine environments. Moving beyond classical paradigms embedded in human-centred rationality, cultural or emotional intelligence, Syncretic leadership reflects a convergence of artificial knowledge, digital fluency, data-informed judgment, and transcultural adaptability, within a fast and continuously changing environment. Through a comparative conceptual analysis and bibliometric mapping of recent scholarly discourse on AI-enabled decision-making and cross-cultural leadership dynamics—conducted using the VOSviewer software —this paper identifies key thematic clusters and intellectual trajectories that signal the formation of this new and unique model. The conclusions point to a growing consensus that effective leadership in the AI era requires harmonising human intuition with machine precision while cultivating inclusive, globally resonant management practices and a new approach to knowledge dynamics. This article contributes to the continuous academic and business debates by articulating the ontological boundaries and ethical tensions posed by the newly launched syncretic leadership model, offering a forward-looking perspective for scholars and practitioners.

Keywords: Syncretic leadership, artificial intelligence, artificial knowledge, knowledge dynamics, digital transformation, multicultural workforce, change.

INTRODUCTION

Syncretic Leadership – the Inception of a New Leadership Model

By 2025, nearly 9 in 10 (89%) chief executive officers are exploring, piloting, or implementing agentic AI (Deloitte, 2025), while at the same time, diverse companies are 70% more likely to capture new markets (Byrne, 2025). The need for a new, integrative leadership paradigm becomes urgent in a context marked by systemic global uncertainty and tensions, accelerated technological transformations, particularly AI-driven (Harari, 2024), and a profoundly transformed workforce that is hybrid, multiethnic, multicultural, multigenerational and more self-aware and context-conscious than ever (Davies, 2022; Vapiwala *et al.,* 2025). This paper introduces and grounds the concept of *syncretic leadership (SL)* as a strategic response to these converging challenges and new realities which forges a redesigned knowledge dynamics.

Leaders today are confronted with an accelerating pace of change matched by immense uncertainty and a new status quo, pushing them to navigate shifting markets, volatile socio-political contexts, and disruptive technological landscapes. As Professor David Rogers points out, replacing tools or adopting new technologies—especially with the

abundance of existing SaaS and AI solutions —is often the easiest part of transformation (Rogers, 2023). The real challenge lies in adapting and adjusting the organization: reshaping systems, reorienting strategies, and enabling people from diverse cultural backgrounds to withstand and thrive amidst continuous disruption (Corbett, 2025; Wu *et al.,* 2025). This demands a new model of leadership approach that goes beyond operational efficiency, embedding adaptability, resilience, and integration into the organization's very fabric. Within this context, *syncretic leadership* emerges as a strategic response, drawing its foundation from both technology-driven and human-centric vectors—such as artificial intelligence and consequently artificial knowledge (AK), digital transformation (DT), multicultural diversity, and change—each supported by bibliometric evidence of their relevance to this new leadership model.

This groundbreaking study is structured around two core research questions, driven by the identified demand for a new integrative leadership model and levelled in theoretical and bibliometric investigation:
RQ1: *Is this article the first in the world to launch the concept of syncretic leadership?*
RQ2: *From a bibliometric perspective, is leadership a central pivot in "artificial knowledge," "artificial intelligence," "digital transformation," "multicultural," and "change," and does it represent a solid base for the new SL?*

RQ1 seeks to determine whether this paper represents the first scholarly introduction of the concept of *Syncretic Leadership*, establishing its novelty within the global leadership discourse. *RQ2* studies, from a bibliometric standpoint, whether leadership functions as a central pivot within five key concepts: artificial knowledge, artificial intelligence, digital transformation, multiculturalism, and change, and whether these vectors collectively furnish a robust foundation for the proposed SL framework.

In terms of structure, the article begins with a concise *Literature Review* to frame and articulate SL's theoretical and conceptual foundations. This is followed by the *Materials and Methods* section, outlining the research technique and bibliometric approach employed. The subsequent *Results and Discussion* section illustrates and interprets the key findings concerning the research questions, leading into the *Conclusions*, where the main contributions, implications, and avenues for future analysis and research are summarised.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Syncretic Leadership

The term *syncretic* has deep historical and linguistic roots that now enrich its relevance to contemporary leadership models. Derived from the Greek word *synkretismos* (συγκρητισμός), it originally referred to the practice of the Cretans (*Kretēs*) who, despite internal differences, would unite in the face of common enemies—a concept captured by the prefix *syn-* meaning "together". This notion of strategic unity was later adapted in *Moralia* by Plutarch (Van Hoof, 2010) and eventually reinterpreted during the Renaissance by Erasmus de Rotterdam in his work *Adagiorum Chiliade* (Erasmus *et al.,* 2001), who extended its meaning to the reconciliation or merging of different ideas, factions or systems. Thus, in modern usage, *syncretic* describes the blending or harmonization of different schools of thought and concepts.

Applied to leadership and rooted in the etymology, syncretism embodies an inclusive, adaptive, and integrative approach. In the author's vision, SL means leaders draw from varied cultural, intellectual, and diverse traditions, supported by AI and a new digital reality, to guide decision-making and build cohesive, resilient organizations within a constantly changing environment.

AI and the new leadership approach

Out of 359 million companies worldwide, 280 million use AI in at least one business function and as of 2025, 78% of businesses have adopted AI technologies, a significant increase from previous years (Alexandrea, 2025). Within this new reality, leaders are being pushed to redraw job descriptions as AI moves from the experimental phase to robust infrastructure (Harari, 2024). Recent surveys show senior executives using generative tools more than other groups, which nudges strategy, budgeting, and talent models toward "AI-first" choices (McKinsey & Company, 2025). In practice, that means treating human–AI teaming as a design problem: which judgment calls stay with people, which pattern-recognition tasks shift to models, and how do the handoffs work under pressure (Vaccaro *et al.,* 2024). The leadership literature related to AI is converging on three tasks. First, capability building: midlevel managers need playbooks, not pep talks, to embed AI into workflows, with measures and standards of success (Kober, 2025). Second, governance: boards expect clear lines on model risks, data provenance, and accountability—responsible AI is as much culture as code (Li, 2024). Third, the operating model and norms shift: successful companies frame AI as a company-wide transformation, not a single executive's portfolio (Winsor *et al.,* 2025).

Empirical studies add nuance. Transformational leadership correlates and connects with faster AI adoption and change receptivity, but only when paired with investment in updated data foundations and reskilling (Abbas *et al.,* 2024; Aziz *et al.,* 2025; Kumari, 2025). Upper-echelon choices still matter: top teams that build "AI fluency"—the ability to question and even contest model outputs, set guardrails, and redesign roles—see better decision quality and innovation velocity (Bevilacqua *et al.,* 2025). Meanwhile, new evidence suggests AI is more likely to complement rather than replace managerial work, elevating skills in

empathy, ethics, and sense-making—areas leaders must acquire and improve but also cultivate (MIT Sloan Office of Communications, 2025).

Taken collectively, the leadership role and mandate in the context of artificial intelligence are inherently pragmatic. Leaders and executives must embed AI competencies across the workforce through sustained capability and skills building, ensure safety and accountability by implementing robust governance mechanisms, and institutionalize adoption by realigning organizational incentives and structural configurations. Organizations that succeed and thrive in this endeavour approach AI initiatives as iterative learning systems rather than symbolic demonstrations, and they evaluate outcomes based on decision-making quality rather than the quantity of models deployed (Singla *et al.,* 2024).

Artificial Knowledge

Bratianu and Paiuc (2025a) introduce *artificial knowledge* as an emergent paradigm in knowledge management (KM) —distinct from traditional human knowledge (Bratianu, 2022; Bratianu & Bejinaru, 2023) - that redefines the boundaries of epistemology by claiming that AI-generated knowledge cannot be equated with justified true belief, but instead constitutes a novel construct created by artificial intelligence technologies. Complementing this, Jun Cui demonstrates that artificial knowledge sharing, dynamic knowledge management capabilities, and organizational learning collectively bolster job performance in technology firms, reinforcing that AK's operationalization shows tangible benefits (Cui, 2025). Furthermore, Ilana Botha emphasizes that AI-enhanced KM systems and approaches demand ethical governance, transparency, and explainability to sustain and nurture trust and responsible usage—key requisites for ensuring that artificial knowledge contributes meaningfully to organizational knowledge ecosystems (Botha, 2025). Meanwhile, Ganuthula and Balaraman are alert to a paradox in professional areas covered by the article's actual proposed leadership matrix: as experts externalise tacit knowledge to AI systems, the very foundations of expertise risk being automated away unless new frameworks preserve and reparameterise the unique value of human judgment (Ganuthula & Balaraman, 2025).

These strands suggest that artificial knowledge is not merely a technical artefact but a socio-technical development requiring conceptual clarity, empirical validation, ethical oversight, and strategic integration from actual leadership.

Digital transformation and multicultural workforce – the transformative impact on leadership

Leadership in the digital age must not only guide technological transformation but also adeptly manage increasingly multicultural teams. Digital leaders who demonstrate and display cultural intelligence (CQ) and foster inclusive digital cultures are more successful in steering transformation across diverse workforces (Paiuc, 2024c). In cross-cultural environments, digital leadership requires adaptability, empathy, and communication skills to effectively bridge cultural differences while deploying new technologies (Paiuc *et al.,* 2024b). Organizational cultures that adopt agility, collaboration, and shared digital values enhance the engagement of multicultural employees during transformation (Deep, 2023). Leaders who merge a digital-first mindset with inclusive leadership styles are better positioned to leverage diverse perspectives for constant required innovation (Rakhmadi *et al.,* 2025; Tariq, 2025). However, the fast integration of AI within almost all companies' functions calls for a new and more agile leadership model, SL, which is proposed in this article.

Empirical findings similarly indicate that transformational and culturally aware leaders mediate the successful integration of digital initiatives, particularly where workforce diversity is high (Sibassaha *et al.,* 2025). Building digital competence and leveraging cultural transformation in parallel empowers leaders to support engagement and performance in diverse, digitally evolving organizations (Reisberger *et al.,* 2024).

Cultural intelligence has arisen as a critical leadership competency in digitally transforming organizations (Bratianu *et al.,* 2024; Bratianu & Paiuc, 2025b). Leaders with high CQ can better diagnose and interpret diverse cultural cues, adapt their behaviors across contexts, and foster inclusive environments that enable collaboration and trust (Earley *et al.,* 2006; Paiuc, 2024b). In multicultural settings, CQ not only enhances communication effectiveness but also sustains the alignment of digital strategies with diverse employee values, thereby improving organizational adaptability and innovation outcomes (Ang *et al.,* 2011).

Across the board, effective leadership in digitally transforming multicultural contexts involves not just technological vision but also strategic intelligence, cultural stewardship, and inclusive capability development (Abd *et al.,* 2019; Paiuc *et al.,* 2024a).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A bibliometric examination approach was taken to support and back the research, utilizing VOSviewer (version 1.6.20), a specialized software conceived for exploring and visualising scientific concepts' landscape (Van Eck & Waltman, 2023). VOSviewer excels in forging visual representations of bibliometric networks, such as co-authorship and co-citation, and—particularly relevant to the study—keyword co-occurrence structures within academic literature. Its utility lies not only in mapping who cooperates with whom or which studies and analyses are frequently cited together but also in uncovering how conceptual themes evolve, interact, and

cluster over time (Saiz-Alvarez, 2024; Van Eck & Waltman, 2023). What places VOSviewer apart is its ability to transform large datasets from databases like Web of Science, Scopus (as in this research), Dimensions, Lens and PubMed - into intuitive, interactive maps. These visualizations help detect semantic relationships, trace thematic development, and assess the intellectual architecture of a research domain (McAllister III *et al.,* 2021).

Applying this methodology clearly illustrates the investigation's originality. The analysis helped pinpoint gaps in current scholarship, evaluate whether and to what extent the newly launched concept of Syncretic Leadership intersects with or departs from established knowledge paradigms, and identify emerging interdisciplinary intersections. More broadly, VOSviewer allows mapping the conceptual topography of this dynamic and fast-evolving field, shedding light on the key clusters, patterns, and trajectories that are likely to define future conversations around AI, digital, and multicultural-enabled transformations in leadership theory and practice.

At the outset, on July 5, 2025, (for practical reasons, the year 2025 until the fifth of July will be recorded as 2025*), the research delved into the core concepts surrounding Syncretic Leadership and examined foundational linked notions within Scopus, utilizing an advanced search model to gather data for the VOSviewer bibliometric analysis. The data retrieval covered the standard time span, from the beginning of the Scopus record timeline to the specified search date. Table 1 reflects the returned results of the Scopus search. The N/A mention is present where there are no results (N/A[1]), impossible to process by Vosviewer results (N/A[2]), or irrelevant for the article's search (N/A[3])- due to specific parameterization.

Table 1: Main concepts frequencies on Scopus

Searched Expressions	Search fields	Returned results	First year of public mention recorded by Scopus	Returned results 2024 - 2025*(till 05.07.25)	Top subject areas	Top document type
"Syncretic leadership"	All Fields	**0**	N/A[1]	N/A[1]	N/A[1]	N/A[1]
"Artificial knowledge"	Source Title	**0**	N/A[1]	N/A[1]	N/A[1]	N/A[1]
"Artificial knowledge"	Article Title	6	1995	1 (16.7%)	Computer Science (50%)	Article (50%)
"Artificial knowledge"	All fields	250	1975	107 (42.8%)	Computer Science (46%)	Article (58.8%)
"Artificial intelligence"	All Fields	4672048	1960	869521(18.6%)	Computer Science (69%)	Conference Paper (47%)
"Artificial intelligence"	Article Title - 2025* - limited to subject area: Business, Management and Accounting	1538	N/A[3]	N/A[3]	N/A[3]	Article (49.9%)
"Digital transformation"	All Fields	134622	1905	68578 (50.9%)	Computer Science (41.5%)	Article (57.6%)
"Digital transformation"	Article Title - limited to *Books*	202	2009	74 (36.6%)	Business, Management and Accounting (63.4%)	N/A[2]
"Multicultural"	Article title limited to Business, Management and Accounting	921	1970	70 (7.6%)	N/A[3]	Article (65.1%)
"Change"	Article Title limited to Business, Management and Accounting - 2025*	3760	N/A[3]	N/A[3]	N/A[3]	Article (63.9%)

Source: author's own research

All pertinent bibliographic records were meticulously extracted from the Scopus database in CSV format, ensuring the inclusion of essential metadata such as citations, abstracts, keywords, bibliographic references, funding acknowledgements, and supplementary descriptors relevant to each source.

Subsequently, in accordance with the methodological framework delineated earlier, the dataset was processed using VOSviewer (v1.6.20). The software facilitates a systematic mapping of keyword co-occurrence patterns, employing a *full counting method* to

ensure comprehensive integration of all keyword/s instances across the dataset (van Eck & Waltman, 2023).

Within the VOSviewer-generated network visualizations, each node depicts a distinct keyword, and its size is directly proportional to the frequency of its appearance within the dataset, indicating its relative weight in the literature. Keywords with more powerful semantic or thematic associations are positioned in closer proximity, while link strength is depicted via the thickness of the connecting lines, which correspond to the degree of co-occurrence (van Eck & Waltman, 2023).

Moreover, the colour-coding of nodes indicates their association and affiliation with distinguishable clusters, representing groups of closely interrelated terms. These clusters provide insight into emerging thematic concentrations like SL and intellectual structures within the field. The spatial arrangement, therefore, serves not only as a visual aid but as a quantitative expression of the structural interdependencies within the academic discourse on the analysed topic (van Eck & Waltman, 2023).

Synthesizing, the rationale and motivation for using VOSviewer in this research is grounded in its precision in mapping co-occurrence patterns and practices, support for full counting methodology, robust cluster detection, network clarity, seamless compatibility with Scopus datasets, and its widespread scholarly acceptance and credibility (Bukar *et al.,* 2023; Kirby, 2023; Van Eck & Waltman, 2023). These attributes and qualities make VOSviewer a technically sound choice and the ideal instrument to support the academic positioning and bibliometric validation of the newly proposed concept of syncretic leadership.

As a research approach, the total link strength of each core concept will be determined, which shows how strongly it is connected to other terms based on how often they appear together in the data. Following this, the share of the leadership and management-related expressions link strength within the total link strength of each concept will be analysed in order to establish SL vectors and demonstrate their connectivity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the previously shared methodology steps and rooted in Table 1, the first Scopus search was for the launched concept of syncretic leadership. The search comprised the most exhaustive investigation in Scopus, using the searched fields "all files," while all the rest of the parameters were kept within the standard predefined fixtures.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the lack of results from the targeted search emphasises the syncretic leadership construct's conceptual originality and uncharted status within existing academic literature, strengthening its novel contribution to the research area.

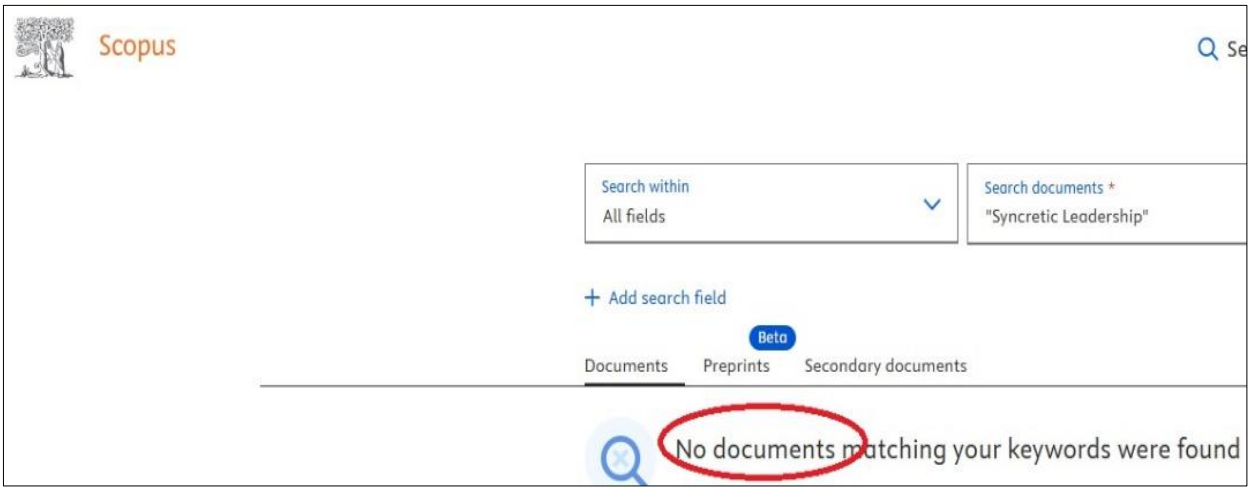

Figure 1: SL: Results of the search based on all files in Scopus. 0 results for SL at 05.07.25
Source: author's own research

The same inquiry was made on the same day to double-check the above results, but this time, it was on the "*all fields*" search option of the Web of Science (WOS) database. The results in Figure 2 show the same inexistence (until this article) of the SL concept within the WOS data archive.

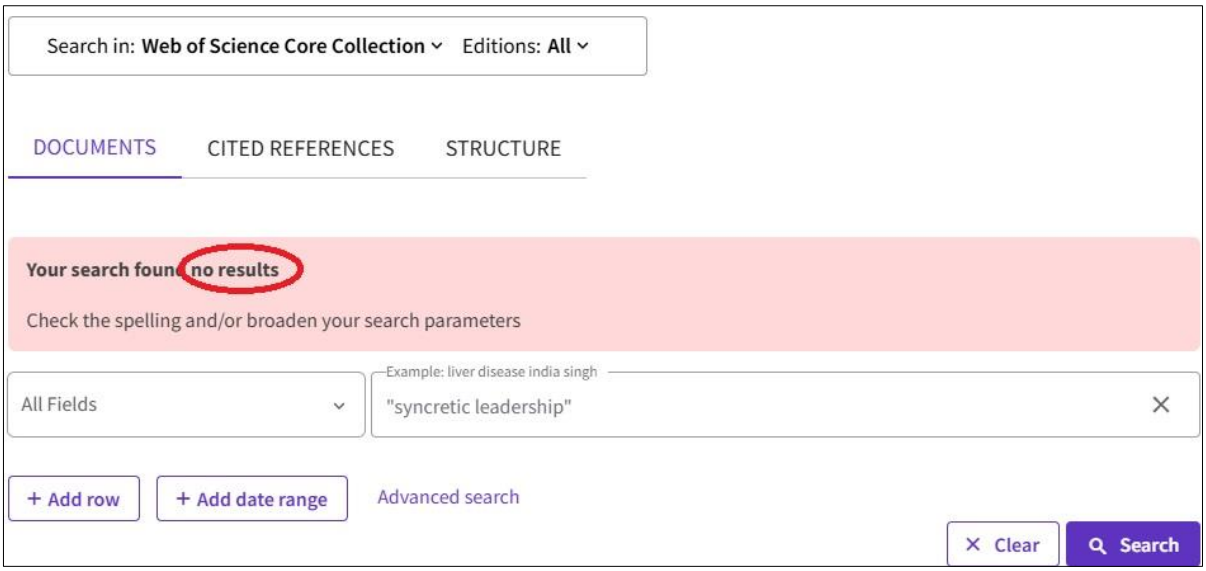

Figure 2: SL: Results of the search based on all files in Web of Science. 0 results for SL at 05.07.25
Source: author's own research

At this stage, and based on the above two analyses rooted in Scopus and WOS (Figures 1 and 2), the first research question was answered, and it has been demonstrated that this article is the first in the world to launch the concept of syncretic leadership.

Table 2 below enhances the number of keywords meeting the standard threshold of 5 for the searched expressions, as mirrored by Vosviewer, the total link strength of the concepts, and the *leadership and management*-related link strength share in the total link strength of each notion.

Table 2: Number of keywords meeting the threshold of 5 as per Vosviewer

Searched Expressions	Search fields	Returned results	Total number of keywords	Number of keywords meeting the threshold of 5	The largest set of connected items - threshold of 5 - consists of:	Total link strength	Leadership and management-related link strength share in total link strength
"Syncretic leadership"	All Fields	**0**	0	0	0	N/A[1]	N/A[1]
"Artificial intelligence"	All Fields	4672048	N/A[2]	N/A[2]	N/A[2]	N/A[2]	N/A[2]
"Artificial intelligence"	Article Title - 2025* - limited to subject area: *Business, Management and Accounting*	1538	6827	396	396	30372	11.2%
"Artificial knowledge"	Source Title	**0**	0	0	0	N/A[1]	N/A[1]
"Artificial knowledge"	Article Title	6	49	0	0	171	15.8%
"Artificial knowledge"	All fields	250	1881	35	35	348	24.7%
"Digital transformation"	All Fields	134622	N/A[2]	N/A[2]	N/A[2]	N/A[2]	N/A[2]
"Digital transformation"	Article Title - limited to *Books*	202	644	8	8	49	12.2%
"Multicultural"	Article Title limited to *Business, Management and Accounting*	921	2472	104	104	1620	11.8% + 6.5% ("team" related)
"Change"	Article Title limited to *Business, Management and Accounting* - and 2025*	3760	14610	673	673	18296	10.1%

Source: author's own research

The initial second search in Scopus was for "artificial intelligence" within *all fields* and returned 4672048 results, which is far above Vosviewer's actual capacity to process, but shows the immense popularity gained by the concept in recent years due to its intersections with most of the socio-economic activities.

Due to this blockage, the search on the same database for "artificial intelligence" was narrowed down to the *article title,* to the year *2025** (until the search date 05.07.25), and limited to the subject area of Business, Management, and Accounting. This new approach returned 1538 results with 6827 total keywords, and 396 valid and representative keywords meeting the standard threshold of 5. Below, in Figure 3, the AI keywords' co-occurrence network for the above-mentioned restrained search is presented.

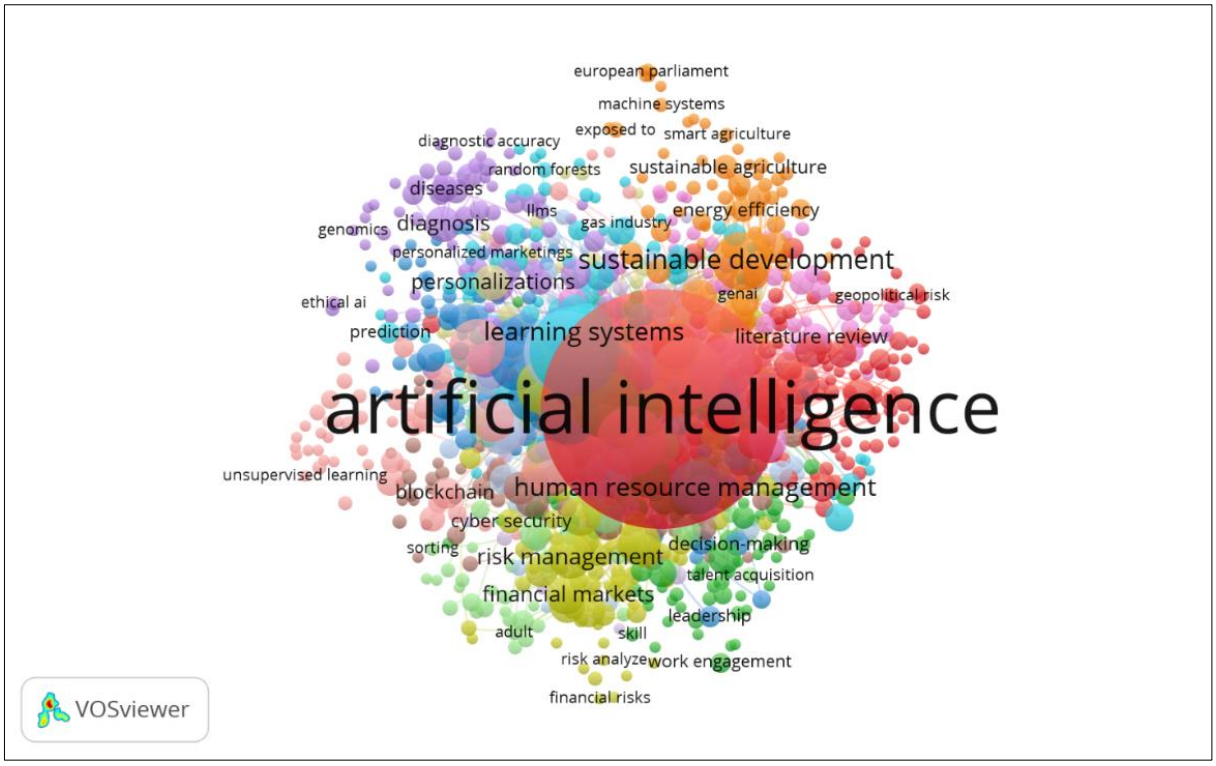

Figure 3: AI: Keywords co-occurrence network-related publications - by VOSviewer. AI in *Article Title - 2025 - limited to *subject area: Business, Management and Accounting*: 396 items meeting threshold of 5. Source: author's own research**

As explained above in *the Materials and Methods section*, and as reflected in Table 2, column 7, in VOSviewer, the total link strength of a concept represents the cumulative strength of all its connections to other nodes within the network, reflecting the overall degree of its association or co-occurrence with other terms in the dataset (Van Eck & Waltman, 2023). In order to see if the main concepts that build SL contain a solid "leadership" component – that will justify its presence as a vector within syncretic leadership, it has been analyzed and portrayed in Table 2, column 8, the share (if and where any) of the *leadership* and *management* core denominations within the total link strength of each notion.

The total link strength of "artificial intelligence" as per Figure 3 and Table 2 is 30372. The leadership and management-related link strength shares in the total link strength of AI is 11.2%. This indicates that 11.2% of the total conceptual associations related to "artificial intelligence" are directly related to leadership and management topics and themes. While AI is primarily a technological domain, this notable percentage points to a growing intersection between artificial intelligence and leadership practices, confirming and reinforcing its relevance within the new framework of syncretic leadership. The presence of leadership-related terms within AI's network signifies that AI is not only adapting and shaping operational processes but is also becoming increasingly integrated into strategic decision-making, leadership progress and evolution, and organizational transformation—consequently supporting its inclusion as a first external vector in the SL model.

Artificial knowledge (AK), as stated by Bratianu and Paiuc (2025a) and presented within the *Literature Review chapter*, is a direct outcome of AI. Therefore, the third search focuses on this extremely new concept and checks whether AI's result is also linked to SL. While initially searching AK in the *source title* returned no results, the extended search on the *article title* presented only six writings, which did not support any possibility for keywords meeting the relevant threshold of 5, but reinforced the novelty of the concept. The third AK search attended, this time within *all fields*, returned 250 results with 1881 keywords, of which only 35 met the threshold of 5 as presented in Figure 4.

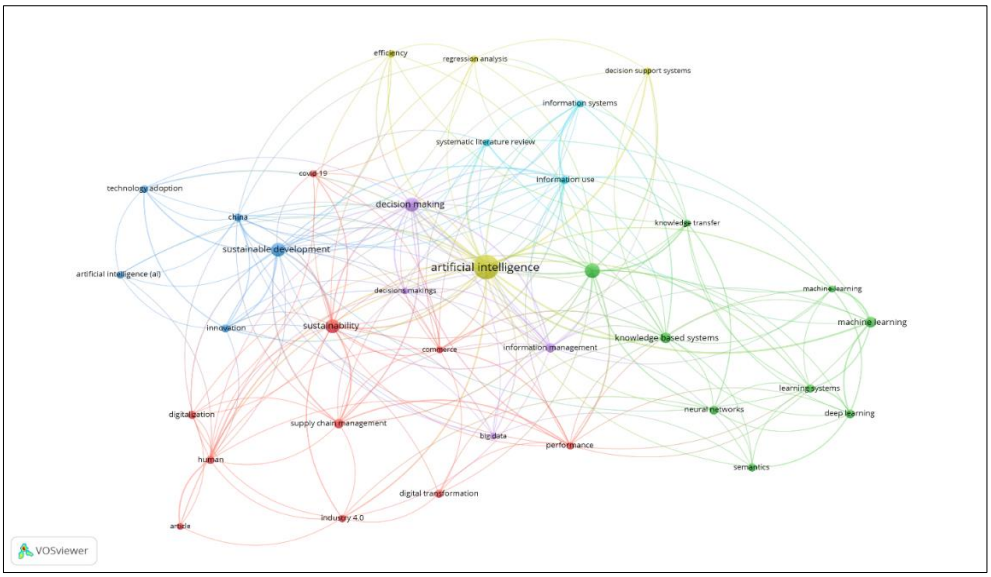

Figure 4: AK: Keywords co-occurrence network-related publications - by VOSviewer. AK in *All Field*s: 35 items meeting threshold of 5.
Source: author's own research

The leadership and management-related link strength share in AK's total link strength is 24.7% (Column 8 – Table 2), meaning that nearly one-quarter of all conceptual associations connected to artificial knowledge are directly tied to leadership and management themes. This proportion is more than double that observed for artificial intelligence, highlighting that AK—as a more refined and application-oriented outcome of AI—appears to have a stronger conceptual integration with leadership-related discourse. Such a finding suggests that, while AI provides the technological backbone, AK is sensed and discussed more often in contexts that involve strategic management, organizational governance, and executive decision-making. This backs its relevance as an emergent driver within the SL model, where the fusion of technological capability and human-centric leadership principles is essential.

The fourth search is linked to *digital transformation*. As enhanced in Table 2, the DT search within *all fields* returned 134622 results, once again, too many for Vosviewer's actual processing capacity. The next DL search was rooted in the *article title* and limited to *books* to narrow the search and focus the subject on the essentials. This time, from 202 results, Vosviewer synthesized 644 keywords, eight of which met the threshold of 5, as presented in Figure 5 below.

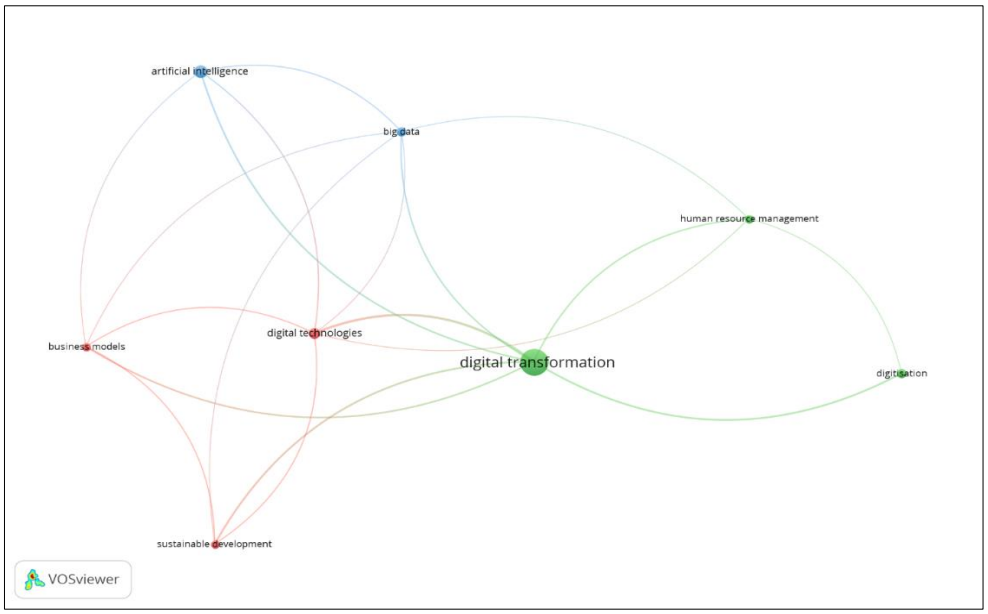

Figure 5: DT: Keywords co-occurrence network-related publications - by VOSviewer. DT in *Article Title, Books:* 8 items meeting threshold of 5.
Source: author's own research

The leadership and management-related link strength share in DT's total link strength is 12.2% putting the digital transformation as another core vector of the newly launched SL. So, while DT remains primarily a technology-driven and process-oriented concept, its notable 12.2% leadership and management association confirms a meaningful overlap with strategic oversight and driven organizational change. This demonstrates its role not only as a catalyst and trigger for operational modernization but also as a driver of leadership adaptation, making it a natural fit as a third external vector within the SL matrix.

The fifth search is focused on the "*multicultural*" component of the actual workforce. The search for *multicultural* within *article titles, limited to Business, Management, and Accounting,* returned 921 results and 2472 keywords, of which 104 met the threshold of 5 (Figure 6).

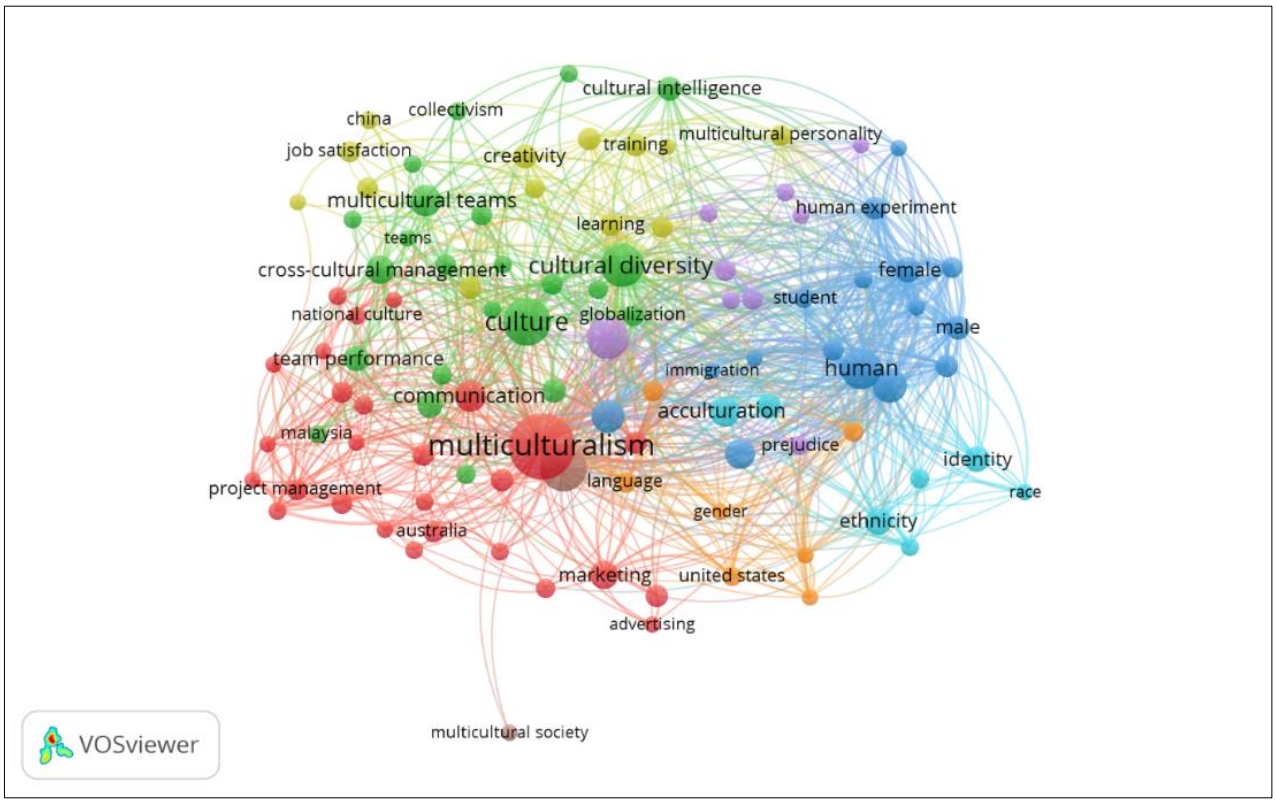

Figure 6: Multicultural: Keywords co-occurrence network-related publications - by VOSviewer. Multicultural in *Article title limited to Business, Management and Accounting:* 104 items meeting threshold of 5. Source: author's own research

As per Table 2, from a total link strength of 1620, the leadership and management-related link strength share in *multicultural*'s total link strength is 11.8%. If the *team*-related strengths are added, this total share increases by an extra 6.5%, reaching 18.3%. The fact that nearly one-fifth of *multicultural*'s conceptual associations are tied to leadership, management, and teamwork emphasises its actuality and its significance in shaping collaborative dynamics within diverse organizational environments. This strong relational presence affirms multiculturalism as a vital human-centric vector in the SL framework, complementing and embedding the technology-driven vectors with actual and essential socio-cultural depth.

The sixth search is represented by *change*, the new normal (Ning, 2025). As Table 2 shows, the *change* search within *article titles* and limited to *Business, Management, and Accounting*—and the *year 2025**—returned 3760 results. Vosviewers counted 14610 keywords, and from these, 673 reached the threshold of 5, which is presented in Figure 7.

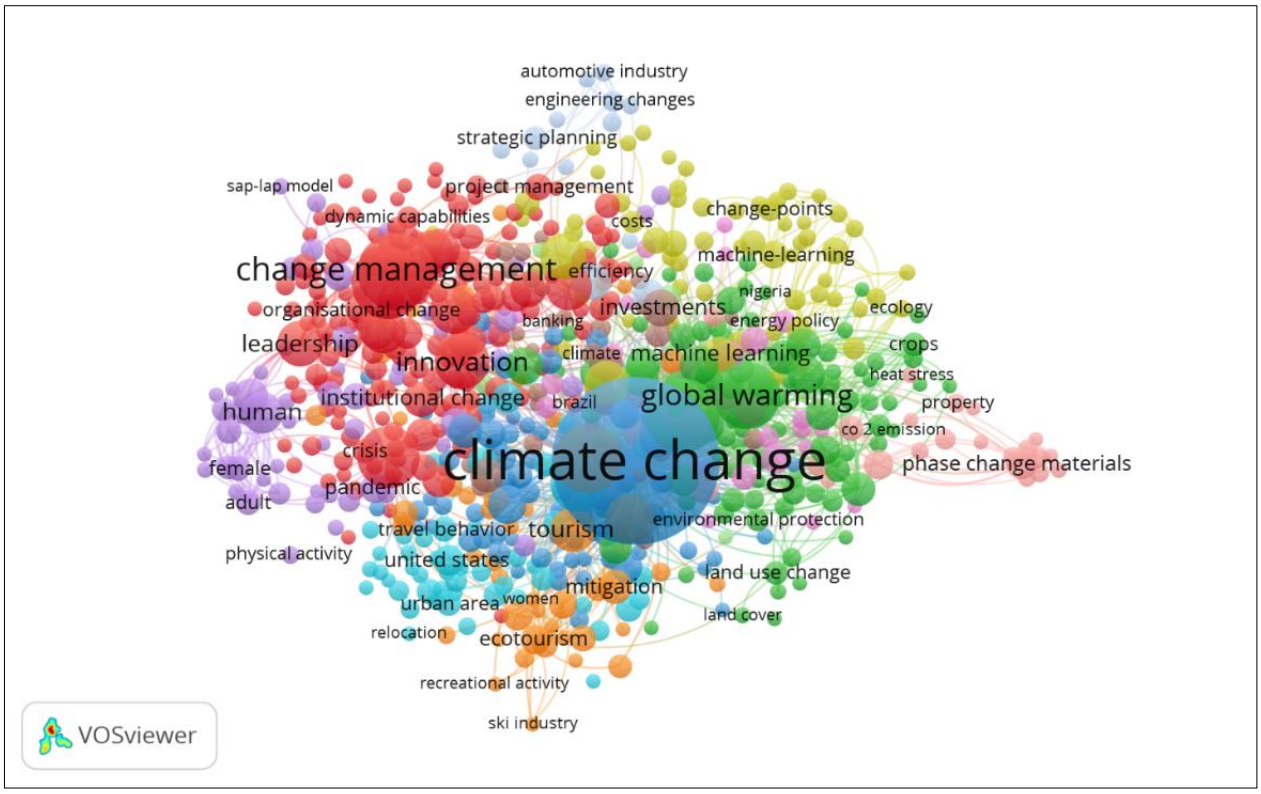

Figure 7: Change: Keywords co-occurrence network-related publications - by VOSviewer. Change in *Article titles limited to Business, Management and Accounting* and within the *year 2025: 673 items meeting the threshold of 5. Source: author's own research**

Leadership and management-related link strength share in *the change*'s total link strength of 18296 is 10.1% as presented in column 8 of Table 2. This 10.1% share highlights that a substantial portion of the discourse around change is inherently concatenated to leadership and management, reflecting the central role leaders play in steering organizations through evolving circumstances. While the concept of *change* transits multiple operational, cultural, and strategic domains, its strong leadership connection reinforces its position as a critical adaptive vector within the SL matrix. In this context, change is not merely an environmental factor but a constant active driver that requires responsive, integrative, and forward-looking leadership practices.

At this stage, the second research question, *RQ2: From a bibliometric perspective, is leadership a central pivot in "artificial knowledge," "artificial intelligence," "digital transformation," "multicultural," and "change," and does it represent a solid base for the new SL?* - has been addressed. The study confirms that each of these concepts demonstrates a notable and measurable association with leadership and management through direct conceptual links. This evidence confirms their relevance as foundational vectors within the syncretic leadership model, ensuring that the framework is built on both technological drivers and socio-cultural dimensions that are inherently anchored in the new SL theory and practice, rooted in the new socio-professional reality.

CONCLUSIONS

This study first introduced *syncretic leadership* as a novel paradigm for navigating the accelerated interplay between artificial intelligence, artificial knowledge, digital transformation, multicultural diversity, and constant change. The bibliometric analyses confirm that leadership operates as a conceptual pivot across these domains, furnishing empirical grounding for positioning them as the external vectors of the proposed model. By showing that *syncretic leadership* has no prior scholarly record in Scopus nor Web of Science, the research demonstrates its originality and necessity within contemporary leadership theory and practice.

The findings highlight that effective leadership in the AI era requires more than technological fluency: it demands the integration of algorithmic precision with human intuition, ethical reasoning, and transcultural competence (Bratianu & Paiuc, 2025a; Reisberger *et al.,* 2024). The notion of artificial knowledge, in particular, highlights the epistemological shift leaders must address, ensuring that machine-generated outputs are harnessed responsibly within organizational decision-making processes (Cui, 2025; Majumder & Dey, 2022). Moreover, digital transformation and workforce multiculturalism back the urgency of adaptability (Paiuc, 2024a), inclusive capability development, and cultural intelligence for sustaining and nourishing innovation and resilience (Bratianu *et al.,* 2025; Sibassaha *et al.,* 2025); all in redesigned knowledge dynamics context.

These analytical insights demonstrate that syncretic leadership is not merely an abstract construct but a practical response to the structural and cultural complexities of the current fast-changing environment. Its core value lies in harmonizing the human and the artificial, embedding inclusivity into digital strategies, and developing leaders who can guide organizations through perpetual uncertainty. Future research should test the operationalization of this model across industries and regions, thereby refining its application and assessing its long-term contribution to leadership effectiveness in both an AI and multicultural-driven world.

REFERENCES

- Abbas, Z. S., Aslam, M. F., Mahmood, F., Ahmad, B., & Raza, S. B. (2024). How will artificial intelligence (AI) evolve organizational leadership? Understanding the perspectives of technopreneurs. *Global Business and Organizational Excellence*, *44*(3), 66–83. https://doi.org/10.1002/joe.22275
- Abd, K. M. A., Abbas, S. A., & Khudair, A. H. (2019). Impact of strategic management practices on organizational entrepreneurship mediating effect of strategic intelligence. *Academy of Strategic Management Journal*, *18*(4), 1–8. https://www.scribd.com/document/470890770/strategy-docx
- Alexandrea, J. (2025, May 6). *How many companies use AI in 2025? Key statistics and industry trends*. Hostinger. https://www.hostinger.com/tutorials/how-many-companies-use-ai
- Ang, S., Van Dyne, L., & Tan, M. L. (2011). Cultural intelligence. In R. J. Sternberg & S. B. Kaufman (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of intelligence* (pp. 582–602). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511977244.030
- Aziz, F., Muzaffar, F., Shahid, D. S., Ahmed, H. S., & Iqbal, S. M. (2025). The role of artificial intelligence in driving ROI through synergized HR, marketing, and financial decision-making. *Research Journal for Social Affairs*, *4*(3), 129–142. https://doi.org/10.63544/ijss.v4i3.153
- Bevilacqua, S., Masárová, J., Perotti, F. A., & Ferraris, A. (2025). Enhancing top managers' leadership with artificial intelligence: Insights from a systematic literature review. *Review of Managerial Science*, *19*(9), 2899–2955. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-025-00836-7
- Botha, I. (2025, August 15). *AI and knowledge management: The future of smarter work*. Digital Workplace Group. https://digitalworkplacegroup.com/ai-and-knowledge-management/
- Bratianu, C. (2022). *Knowledge strategies.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Bratianu, C., & Bejinaru, R. (2023). From knowledge to wisdom: Looking beyond the knowledge hierarchy. *Knowledge*, 3(2), 196-214. https://doi.org/10.3390/knowledge/3020014.
- Bratianu, C., & Paiuc, D. (2025a). Artificial knowledge: Emergence of a new paradigm. *Saudi Journal of Business and Management Studies*, *10*(03), 102–111. https://doi.org/10.36348/sjbms.2025.v10i03.003
- Bratianu, C., & Paiuc, D. (2025b). Emotional and cultural intelligence impact on multicultural leadership. In M. Valeri (Ed.), *Emotional intelligence and networking competencies: Implications for effective leadership* (pp. 15–34). Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-77543-7_2
- Bratianu, C., Paiuc, D., & Bejinaru, R. (2024). The impact of knowledge dynamics on multicultural leadership and the mediating role of cultural intelligence. *European Conference on Knowledge Management*, *25*(1), 103–108. https://doi.org/10.34190/eckm.25.1.2465
- Bratianu, C., Paiuc, D., & Brancu, L. (2025). Exploring the connections between DNA, cultural intelligence and knowledge dynamics in multicultural business environments. *Business Process Management Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1108/bpmj-10-2024-0959
- Bukar, U. A., Sayeed, S., Abdul, F., Yogarayan, S., Amodu, O. A., & Mahmood, R. (2023). A method for analyzing text using VOSviewer. *MethodsX*, *11*, 102339. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mex.2023.102339
- Byrne, H. (2024, December 17). *2025 DEI trends: Diversity in the workplace insights*. Intuition. https://www.intuition.com/2025-dei-trends-diversity-in-the-workplace-insights/
- Corbett, F. (2025). Leadership in the age of artificial intelligence (AI). In S. Dhiman (Ed.), *The Palgrave encyclopedia of leadership and organizational change* (pp. 1–24). Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51650-4_24-1
- Cui, J. (2025). *The explore of knowledge management dynamic capabilities, AI-driven knowledge sharing, knowledge-based organizational support, and organizational learning on job performance: Evidence from chinese technological companies*. Cornell University. https://doi.org/10.48550/arxiv.2501.02468
- Davies, G. (2022, April 28). *How to manage a workforce distributed across the globe*. Spiceworks Inc. https://www.spiceworks.com/hr/workforce-management/guest-article/how-to-manage-a-workforce-distributed-across-the-globe/
- Deep, G. (2023). Digital transformation's impact on organizational culture. *International Journal of Science and Research Archive*, *10*(2), 396–401. https://doi.org/10.30574/ijsra.2023.10.2.0977
- Deloitte. (2025). *Fortune/Deloitte CEO survey: Spring 2025*.

https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/programs/chief-executive-officer/articles/ceo-survey.html

- Earley, P. C., Ang, S., & Tan, J.-S. (2006). *CQ: Developing cultural intelligence at work*. Stanford Business Books.
- Erasmus, D., Roterodamus, E., & Barker, W. (2001). *The adages of Erasmus*. University of Toronto Press.
- Ganuthula, V. R., & Balaraman, K. K. (2025). The paradox of professional input: How expert collaboration with AI systems shapes their future value. *Preprint*. https://arxiv.org/abs/2504.12654
- Harari, Y. N. (2024). *Nexus: A brief history of information networks from the stone age to AI*. Diversified Publishing.
- Kirby, A. (2023). Exploratory bibliometrics: Using VOSviewer as a preliminary research tool. *Publications*, *11*(1), 10. https://doi.org/10.3390/publications11010010
- Kober, G. (2025, January 24). *AI-First leadership: Embracing the future of work*. Harvard Business Impact. https://www.harvardbusiness.org/insight/ai-first-leadership-embracing-the-future-of-work/
- Kumari, V. L. (2025). Artificial intelligence in business management: Unlocking opportunities, addressing challenges, and transforming corporate leadership. *Journal of Information Systems Engineering and Management*, *10*(48), 1208–1220. https://doi.org/10.52783/jisem.v10i48s.9741
- Li, C. (2024, June 13). *Reflections on AI's future by the AI governance alliance*. World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/06/ai-governance-alliance-future-of-ai/
- Majumder, S., & Dey, N. (2022). A bibliometric analysis of artificial intelligence in knowledge management. In S. Majumder & N. Dey (Eds.), *AI-empowered knowledge management: Studies in big data* (pp. 105–111). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-0316-8_7
- McKinsey & Company. (2025, March 12). *The state of AI: How organizations are rewiring to capture value*. https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/quantumblack/our-insights/the-state-of-ai
- MIT Sloan Office of Communications. (2025, March 17). *New MIT Sloan research suggests that AI is more likely to complement, not replace, human workers*. https://mitsloan.mit.edu/press/new-mit-sloan-research-suggests-ai-more-likely-to-complement-not-replace-human-workers
- Ning, G. (2025). Enterprise strategy amid new global changes. In W. Xianqing (Ed.), *Understanding China's path to modernization: Scientific insights and development path* (pp. 205–211). Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-7051-2_16
- Paiuc, D. (2024a). *Developing multicultural leadership using knowledge dynamics and cultural intelligence*. Emerald Group Publishing.
- Paiuc, D. (2024b). Exploring the connections between cultural intelligence, knowledge dynamics, disrupted organisational context and multicultural leadership. In E. M. Vătămănescu & G. Dominici (Eds.), *Great reset—opportunity or threat?. BSLAB 2024* (pp. 111–134). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-76406-6_6
- Paiuc, D. (2024c). Technology and AI's role in multicultural and digital leadership. *Networked Learning Conference*, *14*(1). https://doi.org/10.54337/nlc.v14i1.8011
- Paiuc, D., Iliescu, A. N., & Bejinaru, R. (2024a). Cultural intelligence: A core competence of knowmads in multicultural business environment. *Management Research and Practice*, *16*(1), 5–25. https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1235171
- Paiuc, D., Săniuță, A., & Mirela, A. (2024b). Strategic intelligence: A semantic leadership perspective. *Encyclopedia*, *4*(2), 785–798. https://doi.org/10.3390/encyclopedia4020050
- Rakhmadi, E., Norliani, N., Muhaimim, M., Aslamiah, A., & Cinantya, C. (2025). The role of agile leadership: Enhancing school innovation and adaptability the role of agile leadership: Improving school innovation and adaptation. *Eduvest - Journal of Universal Studies*, *5*(9), 10590–10601. https://doi.org/10.59188/eduvest.v5i9.51122
- Reisberger, T., Reisberger, P., Copuš, L., Madzík, P., & Falát, L. (2024). The linkage between digital transformation and organizational culture: Novel machine learning literature review based on latent dirichlet allocation. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, *16*(1), 2082–2118. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-024-02027-3
- Rogers, D. (2023). *The digital transformation roadmap: Rebuild your organization for continuous change*. Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/roge19658
- Sibassaha, J., Pea-Assounga, J. B. B., & Bambi, P. D. (2025). Influence of digital transformation on employee innovative behavior: Roles of challenging appraisal, organizational culture support, and transformational leadership style. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *16*, 1532977. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1532977
- Singla, A., Sukharevsky, A., Yee, L., & Chui, M. (2024, May 30). *The state of AI in early 2024: Gen AI adoption spikes and starts to generate value*. McKinsey & Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/quantumblack/our-insights/the-state-of-ai-2024
- Tariq, M. U. (2025). The influence of leadership styles on innovation: Driving change through effective leadership. In M. Paradiso-Testa (Ed.), *The impact of innovation in leadership* (pp. 249–274).

IGI Global Scientific Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3373-2402-9.ch010

- Vaccaro, M., Almaatouq, A., & Malone, T. (2024). When combinations of humans and AI are useful: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Nature Human Behaviour*, *8*(12), 2293–2303. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-024-02024-1
- Van Eck, N. J., & Waltman, L. (2023). *VOSviewer 1.6.20 manual*. Universiteit Leiden.
- Van Hoof, L. (2010). *Plutarch's practical ethics: The social dynamics of philosophy*. Oxford University Press.
- Vapiwala, F., Rastogi, S., & Pandita, D. (2025). Is workforce agility the new agenda? Perspectives on the role of constructive task conflicts. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10672-025-09528-6
- Winsor, J., Stave, J., & Kurt, R. (2025, August 4). *Your AI strategy needs more than a single leader*. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2025/08/your-ai-strategy-needs-more-than-a-single-leader
- Wu, J., You, H., & Du, J. (2025). AI generations: From AI 1.0 to AI 4.0. *Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence*, *8*, 1585629. https://doi.org/10.3389/frai.2025.1585629