



Conceptualizing and Measuring Collaborative Leadership in an Organizational Context

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Abstract

This study conceptualizes and investigates the impact of collaborative leadership on the performance of organizations by assessing authentic relationships, leaders' behaviour, and top echelons' support as indicators. Through a quantitative approach employing a questionnaire survey with 217 managers from insurance companies in Kenya, the research used Likert-style questions to gauge perceptions of these collaborative leadership factors and their correlation with performance. Analyzing the data involved descriptive statistics and ANOVA. Findings revealed that authentic relationships, leaders' behaviour, and top echelons significantly and positively impact the performance of these organizations, with top echelons' support being the most influential. Additionally, a combined measure of collaborative leadership encompassing all three variables showed a notable significant and positive impact on performance. The study underscores the significance of fostering employees' mutual understanding and respect within organizations, emphasizing their role in establishing a robust foundation for authentic relationships. These insights offer practical guidance for leaders and managers in organizations, aiming to elevate organizational performance by applying collaborative leadership principles.

Keywords: *collaborative leadership, authentic relationships, leaders' behaviour, top echelons support, performance*

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1.1 Introduction

The concept of leadership has undergone extensive dissemination and scholarly scrutiny, resulting in numerous definitions and dimensions over the decades. Several common themes have shaped our understanding of leadership, including notions of power, command, direction, and transformation, as discussed by Goleman *et al.* (2013), Harris *et al.* (2012), and Northouse (2019). However, amidst this extensive exploration, the fundamental principle of collaborative leadership has not been comprehensively conceptualized, leading to a lax implementation and practice of collaborative leadership, as highlighted by Amborg *et al.* (2016) and Maalouf (2019). This deficiency poses a substantial challenge, particularly within the organizational context, as effective leadership has become increasingly crucial, both before and after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as noted by Amborg *et al.* (2016), Ang'ana and Kilika (2022), and Malouf (2019).

In order to facilitate transformation and success, organizational leaders must exhibit qualities such as engagement, adaptability, humanity, and accommodation of the dynamic business environment and organizational strategic focus, a proposition that aligns with existing scholarship (Harris *et al.*, 2012; Lowy *et al.*, 2005; Pearce *et al.*, 2004; Schmidt, 2006; Transfield *et al.*, 2003; Yukl, 2012), and one with which the authors concur. Collaborative leadership has emerged as a focal point of exploration and discussion due to its profound recognition of the significance of leaders actively engaging with their teams and a diverse array of stakeholders to collectively advance towards the realization of organizational objectives (Amborg *et al.*, 2016; Ang'ana & Kilika, 2022; Maalouf, 2019).

The intrinsic value of collaborative leadership cannot be overstated, as it nurtures a culture of inclusivity and synergistic collaboration, fostering an environment where the collective intelligence and capabilities of individuals can be harnessed to their fullest potential (Bakken, 2018; Boyer *et al.*, 2019). In an era where dynamic and complex challenges are the norm, the advent of collaborative leadership stands as a beacon of hope for enhanced performance in organizations. While the concept has been met with enthusiasm, a notable gap in understanding requires further exploration.

Thus, this research aimed to unveil the contemporary conceptualization of collaborative leadership by delving into its myriad perspectives and dimensions. The pursuit of this study is grounded in recognising the paramount need to elucidate the potential advantages and complexities accompanying this approach in organizational leadership. By unravelling the intricate web of collaborative leadership, we aim to shed light on its transformative influence on the performance of organizations. More specifically, the performance of insurance companies in Kenya.

The driving force behind this research is the belief that a more profound comprehension of collaborative leadership will equip insurance companies in Kenya with a potent tool to adapt to the ever-evolving organizational landscape and thrive within it (Maalouf, 2019). As insurance companies grapple with multifaceted challenges, exploring this innovative leadership approach is vital to elucidate how leaders can inspire their teams, foster authentic relationships and innovation, engender a more agile and resilient leadership behaviour and enable top echelons to support the development of a high-performing organization (Ang'ana & Chiroma, 2021; Ang'ana & Kilika, 2022). This study strives to unearth the key ingredients that catalyze success within collaborative leadership, ultimately empowering insurance companies to embrace and adapt to environmental dynamism and remain resilient.

Collaborative leadership is the independent variable conceptualized in terms of authentic relationships, leaders' behaviour, and top echelons' support. Performance is the dependent variable conceptualized using the sustainable balanced scorecard (SBCS) (Hubbard, 2009). The context of the study was Insurance companies in Kenya. The subsequent sections of this paper unfolds the problem statement, objectives, literature review and theoretical foundations, research methods and design employed, and delve into the study findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Scholars and practitioners in the field of collaborative leadership face an ongoing challenge characterized by a lack of consensus in both conceptualization and paradigms despite a growing body of literature on the subject (Amborg *et al.*, 2016; Ang'ana & Kilika, 2022; Maalouf, 2019). This lack of agreement has resulted in divergent perspectives, hindering the development of a unified multidisciplinary framework for a comprehensive understanding and practical application of collaborative leadership (Bryson *et al.*, 2015; De Silva, Howells & Meyer, 2018; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2019; Hargreaves & Elhawary, 2020). Consequently, this lack of clarity complicates comparative analyses within the scholarship and hampers progress in this critical field (Bakken, 2018; Berardo *et al.*, 2020; Boyer *et al.*, 2019).

Collaborative leadership is garnering increasing attention as a promising approach with the potential to exert a positive influence on performance across diverse sectors, including the public sector, education, healthcare, and non-governmental organizations (Akpedonu, Lumsdaine & Sow, 2013; Bolon *et al.*, 2020; Munene, 2013; Seims *et al.*, 2012; Tondeur *et al.*, 2017). Collaborative leadership has been the subject of considerable empirical investigation within these sectors, shedding light on its potential benefits and efficacy. However, despite these inroads, empirical research into the impact of collaborative leadership on performance outside of these well-explored contexts remains notably limited.

The dearth of empirical studies in non-traditional contexts underscores a critical gap in our understanding of the applicability and effectiveness of collaborative leadership in diverse organizational settings. As collaborative leadership gains prominence as a potentially transformative approach to leadership, there is a pressing need to expand the scope of empirical inquiry to encompass a wider array of sectors, industries, and geographical regions. Such diversification of research is essential to ascertain whether the positive impact observed in specific contexts can be replicated and sustained in different environments.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

In response to this pervasive challenge, this research sought to address a critical gap in the literature by examining collaborative leadership's influence on organisations' performance. The specific objectives of this study were:

1. To establish the impact of authentic relationships on the performance of organizations.
2. To investigate the impact of leaders' behaviour on the performance of organizations.
3. To assess the impact of top echelons' support on the performance of organizations.

2.1 Literature Review

Performance

Performance is the linchpin of an organization's vitality, irrespective of its orientation, and its sustained success is crucial for survival over time (Abdelghany & Abdel-Monem, 2019;

Tomal & Jones, 2015). Organizations are fundamentally driven by their strategic intent, with performance as the vital measure of success. This concept of performance has elicited diverse scholarly perspectives and challenges, particularly in selecting appropriate metrics for assessing multifaceted organizational components (Kuo, 2011; Lim *et al.*, 2010; Ouma *et al.*, 2017). The Sustainable Balanced Scorecard (SBSC) model offers a comprehensive view of performance, considering financial, customer, internal processes, learning and development, and environmental and social factors (Hubbard, 2009). However, the practical application of the SBSC is hindered by the complexity of quantifying social and environmental metrics, leaving sustainable performance a critical aspiration for organizational leaders (Kiragu, 2016; Ouma *et al.*, 2017).

Elements of the Sustainable Balanced Scorecard (SBSC) include financial elements that focus on financial performance, such as revenue, profitability, and cost control. Customer elements that assess customer satisfaction, loyalty, and the organization's ability to meet customer needs. Internal business processes involve evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of internal operations and processes. Learning and development gauges the organization's investment in employee training and development to enhance its capabilities. Environmental and social consider the organization's impact on the environment and its contributions to social responsibility and sustainability (Kimani, 2016; Abdelghany & Abdel-Monem, 2019).

Collaborative Leadership

Effective leadership is indispensable for organizations seeking sustained optimal performance in dynamic operating environments (Northouse, 2019). Leadership is the process by which leaders influence followers to achieve organizational objectives, including performance metrics and transformative changes (Northouse, 2019). Effective leadership involves cultivating relationships, promoting inclusivity, soliciting top-level support, and contributing to strategic focus (Balbuena *et al.*, 2020). Emerging as a promising approach, collaborative leadership emphasizes harnessing collective intelligence and building trusting relationships (Atkinson *et al.*, 2017; Bryson *et al.*, 2015; Maalouf, 2019).

The collaborative leadership approach aims to achieve results through conflict management, problem-solving, and value delivery aligned with everyday purposes (Boyer *et al.*, 2019). The quality of leader-constituent relationships is positively related to favourable organizational outcomes (Kocoglu *et al.*, 2014). Leaders are pivotal in realizing organizational goals and resource management (Bakken, 2018). Open communication, trust, and fairness are essential for employee engagement and organizational advancement (Martin, 2021).

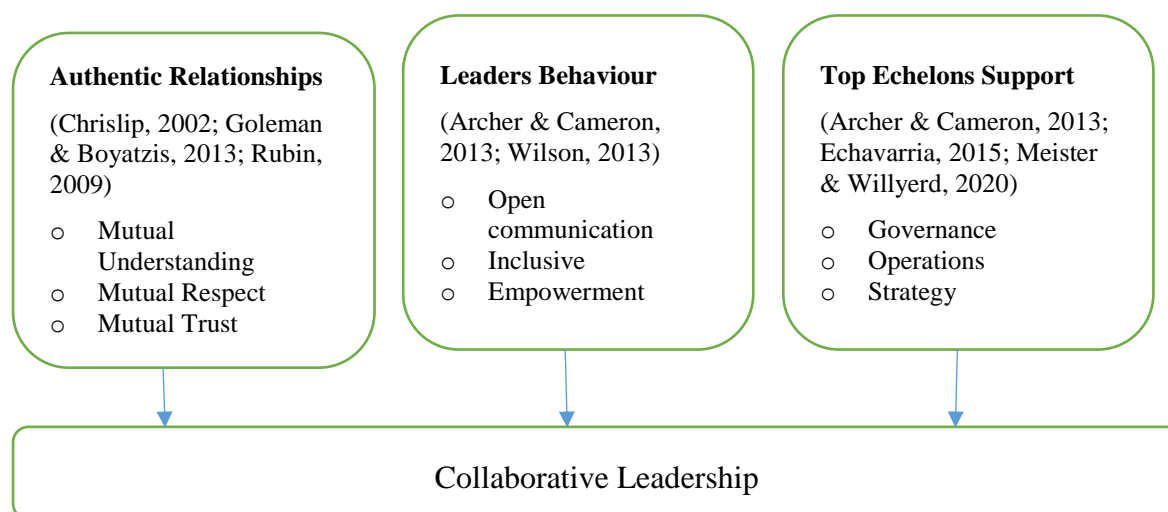
Collaborative leadership involves communication, shared objectives, and conflict resolution mechanisms, focusing on governance, administration, mutuality, norms, and organizational autonomy (Berardo *et al.*, 2020; Walker & Daniels, 2019; Moshtari, 2016). While past research primarily focused on "soft elements," a growing need exists for an integrated collaborative leadership model that aligns paradigms and addresses tangible organizational outcomes (Archer & Cameron, 2013).

Collaborative leadership involves purposeful, strategic, and cooperative entities working together to achieve shared outcomes (Meister & Willyerd, 2020). The value proposition of collaborative leadership hinges on fostering authentic relationships among constituents, with a strong emphasis on trust, effective task execution, and contributions to shared objectives (Drummond, 2019). Collaborative relationships have the potential to redefine an organization's culture by engaging in open negotiations about roles and objectives, all of which ultimately contribute to shared goals (Hargreaves & Elhawary, 2020).

Collaborative leadership necessitates ongoing dialogue, deep reflection, and active listening, all inherently aligned with authenticity. Building consensus across stakeholders is crucial for navigating complex issues and aligning on desired organizational outcomes (Getha-Taylor *et al.*, 2013; Markle-Reid *et al.*, 2017). Transferable competencies, including conflict management, integrated decision-making, and relationship-building skills, are pivotal within collaborative leadership, as they contribute to nurturing authentic, collaborative relationships and driving consensus toward shared organizational objectives (Nick & Mathew, 2013). In this paper, we propose an integrated model centred on authentic relationships, leaders' behaviour, and top echelons' support as core paradigms (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2013; Rubin, 2009; Wilson, 2013; Meister & Willyerd, 2020), aiming to provide a comprehensive perspective on collaborative leadership. This is summarized in Figure 1 and elaborated in detail in the following sections.

Figure 1

Collaborative Leadership Paradigms



Source: Author (2023)

Authentic Relationships

Effective leadership is intrinsically linked to a foundation of honesty and truthfulness, representing the ethical dimension within the relational component (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Central to this is the recognition that the quality of relationships between leaders and their followers, often described as dyadic relationships, plays a pivotal role in effective leadership (Lussier & Achua, 2007). The development and consequences of these dyadic relationships are illuminated by dyadic theories proposed by Balbuena *et al.* (2020). It is critical to underscore that these dyadic relationships may only persist over time when characterized by authenticity and genuineness.

The Social Constructivism Theory (SCT) (Vygotsky, 1962) and the Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Dansereau *et al.*, 1975) underline the paramount importance of the quality of leader-follower relationships, as they fundamentally influence how followers are treated (Robbins & Judge, 2015). This quality aspect accentuates the profound significance of authenticity within these relationships. The authentic relationships paradigm delves into the

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collective intelligence inherent within each individual in a group and accentuates the authenticity of relationships as a catalyst for heightened collaboration. Such relationships are grounded in principles of mutual understanding, respect, and trust.

Leaders who cultivate mutual trust, respect, and understanding are more amenable to relinquishing control and promoting openness (Dyer & Dyer, 2019). Followers, in turn, tend to reciprocate trust and likability by demonstrating loyalty and exemplary performance (Schreiber & Valle, 2013; Vygotsky, 1962). This perspective underscores the central aim of collaborative leadership, which is to strengthen cross-functional relationships that transcend organizational boundaries. Authentically built relationships also profoundly impact how employees relate to the organization, as they foster consensus and more profound understanding among team members (Brock *et al.*, 2017). Studies highlight the positive influence of effective employee relationships on job satisfaction and performance, further emphasizing the pivotal role of authenticity within collaborative leadership for team understanding, engagement, and overall organizational performance (Jiang & Men, 2015; Leroy *et al.*, 2015).

Mutual respect stands as a cornerstone for organizational success, as complex challenges find resolution when employees pool their talents, expertise, creativity, and skills, tapping into the power of collective intelligence (Lau, 2020). Collaborative relationships facilitate the resolution of complex organizational problems, create new opportunities, and ultimately enhance overall organizational productivity and performance (Hargreaves & Elhawary, 2020). These arguments underscore the compelling case for considering the authentic relationship paradigm within collaborative leadership as essential and supportive of the broader discourse on effective leadership (Weller, 2016). The authenticity paradigm emphasizes the importance of authentic relationships in addressing organization-wide issues through unified decisions that impact performance, regardless of an organization's orientation.

Based on the research reviewed in this section, we posit the following propositions to be tested as a null hypothesis regarding the influence of authentic relationships on performance.

H₀₁: Authentic relationships do not influence the performance of organizations.

Leaders Behaviour

Leaders' behaviour significantly influences followers' productivity, and the importance of this aspect cannot be overstated. While authentic relationships are essential, it is crucial to recognize that authentic relationships alone are insufficient to drive intended organizational performance (Balbuena *et al.*, 2020). The paradigm of leaders' behaviour underscores the leader's pivotal role in creating a collaborative leadership environment, emphasizing inclusivity, open communication, feedback, trust, and empowering followers to contribute to shared goals (Atkinson *et al.*, 2017; Bakken, 2018; Burnett & Lisk, 2019).

Collaborative leadership is built on the belief that individuals can collectively excel in competence, creativity, and capability when confronting novel and complex challenges that organizations face today (Echavarría, 2015). Leaders within this framework must exemplify and promote behaviours that advance shared values and goals, using influence rather than relying solely on authority to engage and guide their constituents (Arbabi & Mehdinezhad, 2015; Wilson, 2013). Open communication and feedback are essential for integrated working relationships, and leaders need to model influence within a collaborative leadership approach, avoiding excessive use of positional power (Hoogsteen, 2020).

Effective leaders' behaviour is instrumental in driving effective leadership. Markle-Reid *et al.* (2017) identified seven essential behaviours exhibited by collaborative leaders that

impact performance outcomes. Colbry *et al.* (2014) categorized these behaviours into 'Individual First' and 'Team First' categories, encompassing traits like relationship-building, clear communication, alignment of shared values, capacity building, and open sharing of information and knowledge. These behaviours also significantly impact inter-organisational cross-functional groups (Endres *et al.*, 2020). The conceptualization of the leaders' behaviour paradigm equips leaders with a nuanced understanding of key traits and attributes that facilitate collaborative leadership. Based on this literature, we propose the following proposition to be tested as a null hypothesis regarding the influence of leaders' behaviour on performance.

H₀₂: Leaders' behaviour does not influence the performance of organizations.

Top Echelons Support

Dyadic leadership emphasises leaders' support for their followers and the resulting performance outcomes (Balbuena *et al.*, 2020). Leaders must strategize to ensure organizational success and resilience in today's increasingly complex business environment. Effective leadership encompasses situational awareness, establishing governance and operational frameworks, and implementing strategies that guide organizations in the right direction (Blanchard, 2019).

In collaborative leadership, the top echelons' support paradigm encompasses governance, operations, and strategies as fundamental elements. Establishing collaborative governance and operational structures is crucial to focus on shared outcomes, including conflict resolution mechanisms and defining roles and responsibilities (Archer & Cameron, 2013). Top echelons must foster a balanced power culture, especially in collaborative settings where formal authority might not compel cooperation. Collaborative governance is foundational for effective leadership (Bianchi *et al.*, 2021). Governance aligns informal and formal relationships in problem-solving and decision-making (Emerson *et al.*, 2011; Kinder *et al.*, 2021).

Sustainable success depends on the top echelons' design of strategic, operational processes and systems that enable organizations to thrive in a dynamic operational landscape (Fiberesima & Rani, 2013). These processes and systems empower organizations to anticipate environmental changes and react effectively to maintain a competitive edge. Collaborative strategies, fostering a shared culture, are instrumental in achieving shared objectives (Jin *et al.*, 2019; Kalei, 2018). Collectively, these elements play a pivotal role in facilitating effective leadership within organizations.

Furthermore, top echelons play a crucial role in fostering a collaborative culture that drives the organisation's attainment of shared objectives and values. A shared vision translates into shared ownership and commitment (Hanaysha & Tahir, 2016). Shared accountability is cultivated through active engagement, participation, and attentive listening to organizational teams and groups (Hargreaves & Elhawary, 2020). Open dialogue, feedback mechanisms, and a learning culture are essential for successful collaborative leadership (Iqbal *et al.*, 2018). The primary goal of top echelons in any organization, regardless of its orientation, is to enhance organizational performance and manage stakeholder expectations. They employ strategies such as developing structures to facilitate effective relationships during collaborative crises and conflicts (Bynander & Nohrstedt, 2020). Based on the research reviewed, the below proposition is proposed as a null hypothesis regarding the top echelons' support influence on performance is proposed.

H₀₃: Top echelons support does not influence the performance of organizations.

In summary, collaborative leadership is a multifaceted process that harmonizes authentic relationships, leaders' behaviour, and top echelons' support paradigms to guide leaders and constituents toward optimizing organizational performance. These paradigms exhibit strong interconnections, with none dominating the others. An exploration of these paradigms emphasizes their interconnectedness and mutual influence. The following section delves into theoretical perspectives that contribute to a deeper understanding of the framework for collaborative leadership's influence on performance.

2.2 Theoretical Review

The preceding discussion has brought to light an emerging argument: While collaborative leadership is vital for the sustainable success of organizations, a conceptualization gap has impeded its recognition as an effective leadership practice. In today's increasingly complex operational environment, there is a clear and urgent need for an integrated framework that elucidates how organizational leaders can effectively employ collaborative leadership. Such a framework would empower leaders to discern the critical components of collaborative leadership that can drive organizational success. This paper advocates for integrating insights from two theories, Social Constructivism Theory (SCT) and Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX), as they are crucial to advancing a new trajectory in collaborative leadership scholarship. These theories are discussed in detail below.

Social Constructivism Theory (SCT)

Social Constructivism Theory (SCT), developed by Vygotsky in 1962, forms the foundational framework for understanding the core dimensions of collaborative leadership. It posits that learning occurs within social and cultural contexts, involving the active construction of knowledge through the interplay of personal and environmental factors (Schreiber & Valle, 2013; Vygotsky, 1962). In this context, SCT underscores the importance of authentic relationships as a catalyst for social learning and interaction within organizations, contributing to enhanced organizational performance (Emerson, Nabatchi & Balogh, 2012; Kinder *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, SCT sheds light on the significance of top echelons' support, emphasizing their role in creating a conducive cultural environment that fosters authentic interactions beneficial for organizational success (Archer & Cameron, 2013; Bianchi, Nasi & Rivenbark, 2021).

SCT emphasizes the collaborative nature of small-group interactions and underscores the role of dyadic relationships in organizations. This aligns with the fundamental principles of collaborative leadership, where knowledge is socially constructed and co-constructed (Jin *et al.*, 2019; Johnson & Bradbury, 2015). SCT highlights the leader's role in facilitating successful interactions and discussions, mainly through the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where employees, with the support of top echelons, can develop mutual understanding, trust and respect that might be challenging to achieve through independent interactions (Schreiber & Valle, 2013; Vygotsky, 1962). In essence, SCT underscores an organization's learning and development as inherently social and collaborative activities.

While SCT has seen substantial application in education, its utilization in other organizational contexts, particularly in leadership, has been relatively limited, with a dearth of comprehensive and conclusive research (Adams, 2006; Ardiansyah & Ujihanti, 2018). Furthermore, its application to collaborative leadership within organizational settings remains underexplored. To address this gap, this study aims to complement SCT with insights from the Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) to provide a more comprehensive understanding of

collaborative leadership, offering a novel perspective on effective leadership within organizations.

Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX)

The Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX), which originated from the work of Dansereau, Graen, and Haga in 1975, challenged traditional leadership theories by emphasizing the pivotal role of relationships in leadership (Dansereau, Graen, and Haga, 1975). Traditional leadership theories often depicted leadership as a one-way process from leaders to followers, with limited consideration for individual interactions. LMX theory introduced the notion that the quality of the relationship between leaders and followers significantly influences their interactions (Robbins & Judge, 2015).

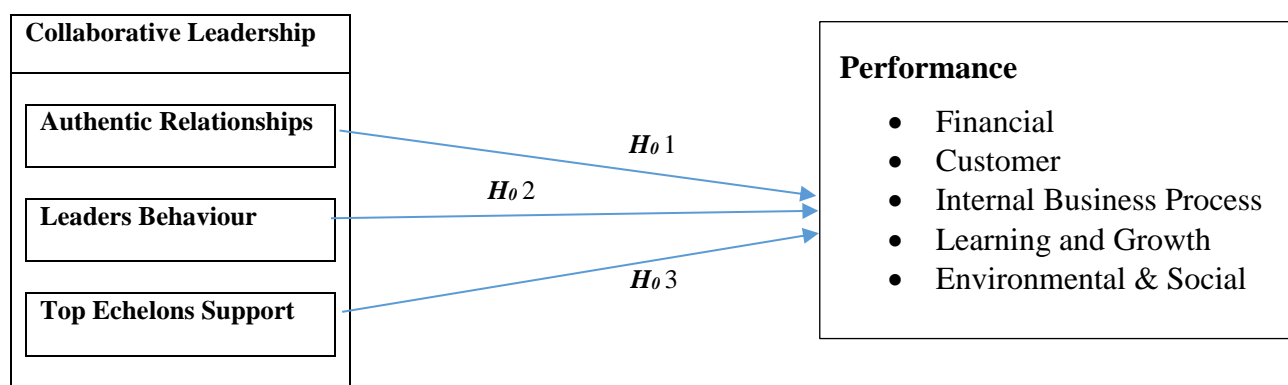
LMX theory posits that a closer working relationship between leaders and followers leads to increased attention and responsibilities, resulting in "in-group" relationships, while more distant relationships result in "out-group" relationships characterized by fewer leader-follower interactions within formal organizational structures (Dansereau, Graen, and Haga, 1975; Robbins & Judge, 2015). This perspective underscores the importance of the leader-follower relationship in leadership dynamics. Graen and Scandura (1987) further developed LMX theory by outlining three stages of LMX relationships: role-taking, role-making, and role-routinization, which help understand the dyadic linkages and collaborative relationships between leaders and followers (Northouse, 2019). In LMX theory, effective work occurs when leaders and followers mutually agree on task methods and extent (Adair, 2008; Robbins & Judge, 2015).

Integrating LMX theory into the broader transformational leadership framework, as Robbins and Judge (2015) proposed, emphasizes that transformational leaders inspire and motivate followers to achieve exceptional performance by fostering empowerment, issue awareness, and personal development. This integration highlights the connection between LMX and transformational leadership in facilitating outstanding group and organizational performance (Odumero & Ifeanyi, 2013).

Nevertheless, LMX theory has faced criticism for its potential to perpetuate in-groups and out-groups within organizations, leading to biases and unequal treatment. Critics have argued that LMX theory does not adequately explain how leader-follower relationships are built and maintained (Anand *et al.*, 2011). To address these concerns and bridge the gaps in understanding, this study suggests the integration of the Social Constructivism Theory (SCT), which provides insights into how high-quality relationships are developed and how leaders can foster open communication by building mutual trust, respect, and understanding (Wang *et al.*, 2022). The combined conceptualization of LMX and SCT offers a comprehensive foundation for understanding collaborative leadership in contemporary organizational settings and enhancing performance. Figure 2 summarizes the conceptual framework adopted in this study.

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework



Source: Author (2023), Literature review

3.1 Methods

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationships among the dependent and independent variables. Quantitative research investigates variables by gathering data and performing statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Sample

Primary data were collected from the employees of insurance companies in Kenya (sample size, 240 mid-level to senior managers). Stratified random sampling was applied. According to Saunders and Townsend (2016), for a population of around 200, a sample of 132 is considered sufficient at a 5 % significance level (p. 219). To have maximum representation from the population, we distributed a questionnaire among all mid-level to senior managers working in 42 insurance companies in Kenya. We distributed around 240 questionnaires, and finally, 217 (90.4%) respondents who correctly filled out the questionnaire were included as a sample for this study, which is much more than the calculated sample size of 132.

Instruments

The main instrument used in this study was a self-designed structured questionnaire—a five-point Likert questionnaire to measure collaborative leadership and performance items. Collaborative leadership was measured using 27 items from the three variables of authentic relationships, leaders' behaviour, and top echelons support, with each variable having three indicators. Performance was measured using 16 items from the sustainable balance scorecard, indicators of financials, customers, internal business process, learning and growth, and environmental and social factors.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analysed through SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 29. Descriptive statistics and multiple regression analyses were run to investigate the propositions.

Ethical Procedures

In this study, there was no foreseeable harm to the participants involved. To safeguard the confidentiality and anonymity of both the participants, the human resources personnel of each participating insurance company were responsible for emailing the eligible managers based on the study's criteria. All participants in this study were adults over the age of 18, and their involvement was entirely voluntary. The researcher ensured that the participants' identities remained anonymous and that the survey responses were confidential. The researcher designed and maintained the survey instrument on a password-protected computer to maintain data security. Prior to distributing the surveys, explicit permission to participate in the study was obtained from each participant. These ethical considerations and data protection measures were implemented to ensure the safety and privacy of the individuals involved in the research.

4.1 Results

Demographic Characteristics

Further, regarding the sample's demographic characteristics related to the respondents' gender, 49 % were male, 47 % were female, and 4% did not wish to disclose. Regarding the length of service of the respondents in their organizations, 21 % of the respondents fell within 5 to 10 years, 27% of the respondents fell within 10 to 15 years, 38 % of the respondents fell within 15 to 20 years, and 14% of the respondents have worked for more than 20 years in their organization. Regarding the length of operations of the respondents' organization in Kenya, 17 % of the organizations had an experience of less than 10 years, 9% of the organizations had experience above 10 to 15 years, 15% of the organizations had experience above 15 to 20 years, and 59% of the organizations had the experience of above 20 years operating in Kenya.

Testing for Assumptions

Initial screening tests were performed (i.e., missing values and outliers). Further, the reliability of each variable was determined. A threshold value of 0.7 or above shows the reliability of a measure (Hair *et al.*, 2010; Nunnally, 1978). Table 1 indicates that the alpha values of all four variables' Cronbach's exceeded .70. Therefore, all variables achieved the required standard.

Table 1.

Reliability and Descriptive Summary

Variable	Reliability	No. of Items
Authentic Relationships	0.854	9
Leaders Behaviour	0.891	9
Top Echelons Support	0.920	9
Performance	0.911	16

Source: Field Data (2023)

Table 2 shows the KMO and Barlett tests—the KMO value of 0.659 is greater than 0.5 and is considered excellent. Additionally, Bartlett's test shows a significance value of <0.001, less than $p < 0.05$, indicating that the factors forming the variables are satisfactory. This means there is no high correlation or coefficient among the items and variables.

Table 2.

KMO and Bartlett's Test

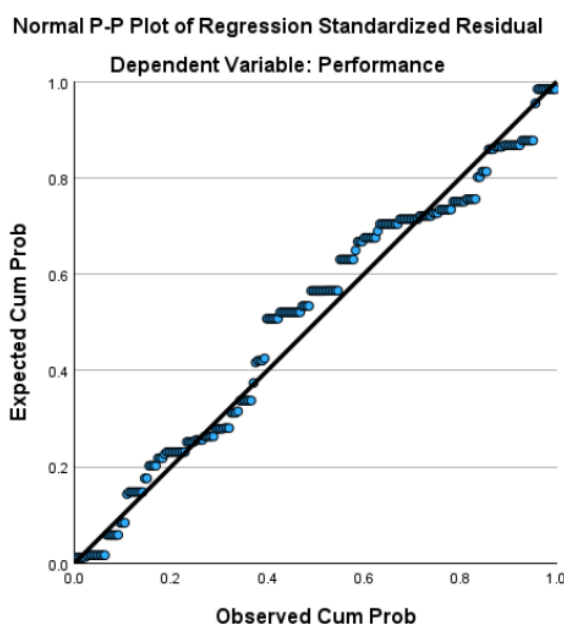
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.659
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	560.420
	df	6
	Sig.	<.001

Source: Field Data (2023)

Furthermore, assessing the normality of the independent and dependent variables was imperative by employing the normal Probability-Probability (P-P) plot for the regression-standardized residuals. The assessment of normality involved generating a normal P-P plot for the regression-standardized residuals. Figure 3 provides a visual representation of this plot. The outcomes of the normal P-P plots consistently demonstrated that the residuals conformed to a normal distribution. This adherence to a normal distribution served as a pivotal prerequisite for subsequent multivariate and hierarchical regression analyses.

Figure 3.

Normal P-P plot of Performance



Source: Field Data (2023)

The multicollinearity test was ascertained by analysing the degree of correlation among research predictor variables, which assumes pivotal importance. This evaluation was critical in ensuring the fidelity of the study's regression model, explicitly concerning the precise association of the outcome variable with its corresponding predictor variables, as Chikere *et al.* (2019) posited. The findings of this analysis are succinctly presented in Table 3. The results

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indicate that the predictor variables under examination exhibited tolerance values of 0.166 (VIF=6.034) for authentic relationships, 0.286 (VIF=3.500) for leaders' behaviour, and 0.319 (VIF=3.132) for top echelons' support which are all greater than Tolerance = 0.1 and less than VIF = 0.7 (Chikere *et al.*, 2019). The results validated the multicollinearity assumptions and confirmed that the data was fit for further analysis.

Table 3.

Multicollinearity Test Results

Coefficients ^a		Collinearity Statistics	
Model		Tolerance	VIF
1	Authentic Relationships	.166	6.034
	Leaders Behaviour	.286	3.500
	Top Echelons Support	.319	3.132

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

Source: Field Data (2023)

Finally, it is imperative to acknowledge that not all variable factors bear statistical significance in research. In light of this, the study employed communalities to gauge the substantive importance of the study's variable factors, with a loading threshold of 0.7 being considered an acceptable criterion, as stipulated by Mooi and Sarstedt (2010). The analysis encompassed a comprehensive factor analysis, during which every questionnaire item exhibited loading values surpassing the 0.7 benchmark. Consequently, it was determined that all questionnaire items were well-suited for inclusion in the subsequent regression analysis.

4.2 Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: H₀₁: Authentic relationships do not influence the performance of organizations.

Authentic relationship was measured using three indicators (mutual understanding, mutual respect, and mutual trust). To establish the extent of the influence of authentic relationships on performance, the participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with statements that relate to authentic relationships as they apply to their organizations on a 5-point Likert scale. The descriptive statistics generated were mean scores and standard deviation. The respondents rated the mutual respect indicator the highest, at an average mean of 3.81 (SD = .811). Table 4 gives a summary of the descriptive results.

Table 4.

Descriptive Statistics for Authentic Relationships

Authentic Relationships indicators	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	CVs (%)
Mutual Understanding	217	3.78	0.87	0.768	23%
Mutual Respect	217	3.81	0.81	0.661	21%
Mutual Trust	217	3.56	0.88	0.787	25%

Source: Field Data (2023)

The results presented in Table 5 indicate a positive relationship between authentic relationships and performance ($R=0.278$, $p<.001$). The F-value is 18.044 at a significance value of <0.001 , below $p<0.05$, indicating that this model fits for regression. The Beta value (B) for authentic relationships is 0.278, indicating that with a one-unit increase in authentic relationships, the performance of organizations will increase by 0.278 units. Finally, the T-stat value for authentic relationships is 4.248 at a significance level of <0.001 , less than $p<0.05$, indicating that the null hypothesis H_01 should be rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted.

Table 5.

Results of ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) for Authentic Relationships

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.587	1	5.587	18.044	<.001 ^b
	Residual	66.571	215	.310		
	Total	72.158	216			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Authentic Relationships

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
2	(Constant)	2.701	.244		11.067	<.001
	Authentic Relationships	.276	.065	.278	4.248	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

Source: Field Data (2023)

Hypothesis 2: H₀₂: Leaders' behaviour does not influence the performance of organizations.

Leaders' behaviour was measured using three indicators (open communication, inclusive, and empowerment). To establish the influence of leaders' behaviour on performance, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with statements that relate to their organization on a 5-point Likert scale. The descriptive statistics generated were mean scores and standard deviation. The respondents rated the empowerment indicator the highest, at an average mean of 3.70 (SD = .784). Table 6 gives a summary of the descriptive statistics results.

Table 6.

Descriptive Statistics for Leaders' Behaviour

Leaders' behaviour Indicators	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	CVs (%)
Open Communication	217	3.50	0.815	0.676	24%
Inclusive	217	3.56	0.836	0.701	23%
Empowerment	217	3.70	0.784	0.630	21%

Source: Field Data (2023)

The results presented in Table 7 indicate that a positive relationship exists between leaders' behaviour and performance ($R=0.265$, $p<.001$). The F-value is 16.296 at a significance value of <0.001 below $p<0.05$, indicating that this model fits for regression. The Beta value (B) for leaders' behaviour is 0.265, indicating that the organizations' performance will increase by 0.265 units with a unit increase in leaders' behaviour. Finally, the T-stat value for leaders' behaviour is 4.037 at a significance level of <0.001 , less than $p<0.05$, indicating that the null hypothesis H_02 should be rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted.

Table 7.

Results of ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) for Leaders Behaviour

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
3	Regression	5.084	1	5.084	16.296	<.001 ^b
	Residual	67.074	215	.312		
	Total	72.158	216			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Leaders' Behaviour

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.805	.231		12.147	<.001
	Leaders Behaviour	.256	.064	.265	4.037	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

Source: Field Data (2023)

Hypothesis 3: H₀₃: Top echelons' support does not influence the performance of organizations.

Top echelons' support was measured using three indicators (collaborative governance, operations, and strategy). To establish the influence of top echelons' support on performance, the participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with statements that relate to their organization on a 5-point Likert scale. The descriptive statistics generated were mean scores and standard deviation. The respondents rated the operations indicator the highest, at an average of 3.76 (SD = .910). Table 8 gives a summary of the descriptive statistics results.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for Authentic Relationships

Top Echelons Support Indicators	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	CVs (%)
Governance	217	3.72	0.898	0.808	24%
Operations	217	3.76	0.910	0.832	25%
Strategy	217	3.60	0.974	0.966	27%

Source: Field Data (2023)

The results presented in Table 9 indicate a positive and strong relationship between top echelons' support and performance ($R=0.429$, $p<.001$). The F-value is 48.402 at a significance value of <0.001 below $p<0.05$, indicating that this model fits for regression. The Beta value (B) for top echelons support is 0.429, indicating that with a one-unit increase in top echelons support, the performance of organizations will increase by 0.429 units. Finally, the T-stat value for top echelons support is 6.957 at a significance level of <0.001 , less than $p<0.05$, indicating that the null hypothesis $H03$ should be rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted.

Table 9

Results of ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) for Top Echelons Support

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
4	Regression	13.260	1	13.260	48.402	$<.001^b$
	Residual	58.899	215	.274		
	Total	72.158	216			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Top Echelons Support

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.467	.184		13.388	$<.001$
	Top Echelons Support	.341	.049	.429	6.957	$<.001$

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

When all three collaborative leadership variables are combined (composite), the results in Table 10 indicate that the influence of collaborative leadership (composite) on performance is statistically significant ($p<0.05$). Collaborative leadership correlates with performance up to $B=0.360$, reflecting a strong and positive relationship with performance. The model explained by collaborative leadership was statistically significant (Higher F-value = 31.953, $p<0.001$). The results indicate that the relationship between authentic relationships, leaders' behaviour, top echelons support and performance exists and can be explained by composite collaborative leadership.

Table 10

Results of ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) for Collaborative Leadership (Composite)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	9.337	1	9.337	31.953	$<.001^b$
	Residual	62.822	215	.292		
	Total	72.158	216			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance
 b. Predictors: (Constant), CollaborativeL

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.426	.233		10.423	$<.001$
	CollaborativeL	.354	.063	.360	5.653	$<.001$

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

4.3 Discussions

Considering and contrasting the three pivotal variables associated with collaborative leadership, namely authentic relationships ($M = 3.72$; $SD = 0.584$), leaders' behaviour ($M = 3.59$; $SD = 0.598$), and top echelons support ($M = 3.69$; $SD = 0.727$), the study findings revealed discernible insights pertaining to employees within organizations. There exists a notable presence of authentic relationships among employees, reflecting a favourable level of interpersonal trust. Moreover, senior management has rendered substantive governance and operational support.

Nonetheless, a salient observation is a need for substantial improvement in leaders' behaviour, particularly in facets involving transparent communication and inclusivity. This deficiency may be intrinsically linked to the evident deficit in mutual trust and the manifold challenges encountered in strategic formulation and execution within organizations. The findings are similar to other studies, such as Moshtari's (2016) study on inter-organizational fit, relationship management capability, and collaborative performance within a humanitarian setting, which found a positive influence on forming and functionalizing a collaborative framework on performance and argued that it requires governance, administration, mutuality, norms, and organizational autonomy. Maalouf (2019) explored the impact of collaborative leadership on organizational performance and revealed a noteworthy positive association between collaborative leadership and the performance of small business owners in Lebanon. This study suggested that adopting a collaborative leadership approach is imperative for improving organizational performance.

The findings pertaining to authentic relationships underscore the intricate and multifaceted dynamics of trust within organizational frameworks where establishing and preserving trust play a pivotal role. Consequently, it is imperative for organizations to proactively address trust challenges to foster genuine and authentic relationships among their employees (Karanja & Anthony, 2016; Samwel, 2018). It is worth noting that the support provided by top echelons exerts a profound influence, underscoring the pivotal role that senior leadership assumes in the effective implementation of collaborative leadership strategies.

5.1 Conclusion

The first objective of this study was to establish the impact of authentic relationships on performance. The outcome of this investigation substantiates that authentic relationships exert a positive and moderate influence on the performance of organizations. The identified indicators of authentic relationships are, in fact, pivotal drivers of performance. Consequently, it becomes imperative for organizations to confront and mitigate trust-related challenges, as they form a fundamental element in cultivating authentic relationships among team members.

The second objective was to investigate the impact of leaders' behaviour on performance. It can be reasonably inferred that leaders' behaviour yields a positive and moderate impact on the performance of organizations. Essential leadership behaviours, encompassing attributes that facilitate collaborative leadership, such as open communication, inclusiveness, and empowerment, significantly contribute to the overall performance outcomes.

Finally, the third objective of this study was to assess the impact of top echelons' support on performance. This investigation culminates in the conclusion that the support of top echelons exerts a pronounced positive influence, with a substantial magnitude, on the performance of organizations. This underscored emphasis on senior leadership support aligns with the prevailing understanding that substantive organizational changes and cultural transformations often necessitate robust backing from top-level executives. It accentuates the notion that collaborative leadership is not solely a grassroots effort but is intrinsically tied to the alignment and endorsement of top-tier management.

When these three collaborative leadership variables are jointly considered (composite), they collectively demonstrate an elevated explanatory capacity in relation to performance, surpassing the explanatory capability of individual variables in isolation. This confluence of evidence leads to the conclusion that amalgamating all three variables augments the explanatory potential of collaborative leadership concerning performance outcomes. It can be deduced that the manifestation of collaborative leadership effectively influences the performance of organizations, underscoring the advantages inherent in a holistic and comprehensive approach to collaborative leadership, which, in turn, can yield superior performance in organizations.

5.2 A Future Research Agenda on Collaborative Leadership

The exploration of collaborative leadership theories within this article's literature review section enriches our comprehension and provokes essential inquiries. Scholars such as Archer and Cameron (2013), Hargreaves and Elhawary (2020), and Maalouf (2019) advocate for a broader perspective on collaborative leadership theory. Despite considerable research, the field encounters a challenge in establishing unified collaborative leadership concepts that transcend disciplinary boundaries. This absence of consensus sparks continual debates and discussions within the field.

Collaborative leadership research lacks comprehensive models (Archer & Cameron, 2013; Hargreaves & Elhawary, 2020). A robust theory of collaborative leadership, validated through empirical evidence, is imperative for advancing theoretical frameworks and practical applications. A systematic approach is needed to grasp the essence and measurement of collaborative leadership. Without this systematic approach, interpretations of collaborative leadership will diverge based on individual theoretical standpoints. Consequently, constructing theories becomes complex, and evaluating collaborative setups relies on inconsistent subjective evaluations.

This theoretical discord has created a multifaceted landscape of dimensions and paradigms within collaborative leadership. Thus, a multidisciplinary approach becomes essential to comprehend and implement this phenomenon in organizational contexts. This discrepancy prompted the current research, propelling the proposal and delineation of the collaborative leadership framework highlighted in this study. This framework encompasses authentic relationships, leader behaviour, and top echelons support. It is established upon an exhaustive literature review and fortified by rigorous quantitative analysis using data gathered from respondents in insurance companies in Kenya, constituting a substantial scholarly contribution.

In alignment with Higgins' (2004) criteria, a robust theory must possess testability, coherence, economy, generalizability, and explanatory power. The findings of this research present a model that might significantly contribute to the broader research agenda—enabling the mapping of diverse models on collaborative leadership. Through a systematic examination of literature complemented by fieldwork research, a definition of collaborative leadership emerges, spanning various theoretical perspectives rather than favouring a singular viewpoint. Moreover, the construct validity of this study's collaborative leadership definition is successfully tested against sample data using ANOVA models.

Acknowledging the partiality inherent in this study's viewpoint, it is intended to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding collaborative leadership's essence. The model developed in this study is offered to the collaborative leadership research field for refinement, continued debate, and utilization by scholars and practitioners alike. It is a tool to navigate the complex landscape of collaborative leadership, both in research and practical applications.

5.3 Managerial and Leadership Implications

The findings of this study hold substantial implications for leadership and managerial strategies in organizations. Organizational leaders are encouraged to extract valuable insights from this study's outcomes, focusing on cultivating an organizational milieu marked by nurturing trust-based relationships among their workforce. It is paramount for leaders to actively promote a climate that fosters mutual understanding and mutual respect, as these are integral prerequisites for establishing a robust foundation for authentic relationships. This directive stems from the study's discernment of relatively low mean scores in the pertinent indicators of authentic relationships. Such findings underline the profound impact of these aspects on the performance of organizations.

5.4 Areas for Future Research

The outcomes of this study present valuable opportunities for future practitioners and researchers alike. Future research endeavours may utilize this study as a foundation to explore the applicability of collaborative leadership within various industries beyond insurance companies. Such investigations could involve comparative analyses aimed at delineating sector-specific nuances and offering tailored solutions for implementing collaborative leadership and its influence on performance. By doing so, practitioners can glean industry-specific insights to apply collaborative leadership principles in diverse organizational contexts effectively.

Additionally, prospective researchers may consider delving into the role of environmental factors in shaping the intricate relationship between collaborative leadership and performance. Since organizations invariably operate within unique environmental contexts, exploring how external factors interact with and impact the collaborative leadership performance nexus can provide crucial insights. Consequently, future research endeavours may aim to unravel the complex interplay between collaborative leadership, organizational performance, and the dynamic external conditions these organizations are embedded in. This avenue of research promises to contribute to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play within leadership and organizational performance.

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